PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 285

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1996–97

COMPRISING PERIOD
11 November—21 November 1996

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11 November 1996

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 285**

SECOND VOLUME OF SESSION 1996–97

House of Commons

Monday 11 November 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Single Currency

1. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what study he has made of the impact on United Kingdom competitiveness of entry into a single currency; and if he will make a statement. [1296]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Michael Heseltine): Such a study can be made only when the circumstances under which economic and monetary union will go ahead become clearer.

Mr. Cohen: Will the Deputy Prime Minister clearly state what terms for entry into a single currency he considers unacceptable for United Kingdom competitiveness? I oppose the huge public spending cuts that convergence would cause. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with me? Is not the Government's lack of clarity on the issue intended to cover up the huge chasms in the Conservative party and is not the Deputy Prime Minister really a closet supporter of the single currency, whatever the terms?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman must have missed out on the attempts by the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer to paper over the huge chasm in the Labour party over the social chapter, as he is now doing in Harrogate. The standards about which the hon. Gentleman seeks an answer are simple: we shall judge economic and monetary union against the best interests of Britain.

Mr. Gill: Will my right hon. Friend take time to explain to the Confederation of British Industry what happened to unemployment in Britain when we were on the gold standard between 1925 and 1931 and during our membership of the exchange rate mechanism in 1992? On both occasions, unemployment doubled, and that is politically unacceptable.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's views and he will doubtless convey them to British industry.

Government Committees

2. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister on what Government Committees he currently sits. [1298]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am a member of 15 Cabinet Committees, five of which I chair.

Mr. Winnick: Which of those Committees deals with relations with the civil service? Did not the Deputy Prime Minister want civil servants to become involved in Government and Conservative party matters, but the Cabinet Secretary, rightly, vetoed that initiative? Does that not demonstrate once again that we have a sleaze-ridden and politically corrupt Administration? The Government are loathed in the country and Cromwell's words to the Rump Parliament could not be more appropriate to them.

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman asked four questions. The answer to the first, second, third and fourth is no.

Mr. Dunn: Can my right hon. Friend confirm whether any of the Committees on which he sits is concerned with

the appointment of special advisers to Government Departments? Did not the Labour Government introduce special advisers to politicise the civil service?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The worst and most excessive example of the politicisation of the civil service was the appointment of a Labour party sympathiser as chief press officer at No. 10 Downing street—a precedent that is likely to lead to Mr. Alastair Campbell being considered for the post if ever a Labour Government are re-elected.

Mr. Radice: Does the Deputy Prime Minister accept that his memo to the Prime Minister of 24 July broke the spirit and the letter of the civil service code that was first proposed by an all-party Select Committee?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It certainly did not. It left open the question of how Ministers should address the issue covered in the memorandum. I agreed with Sir Robin Butler that it should be done through special advisers, and quite rightly so. I would never tolerate the politicisation of the civil service.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, during the life of the last Labour Government, the main question would not have been accepted by the Table Office and he would not have been allowed to answer it? It was only this Government who admitted the existence of Cabinet Committees, published "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" and consistently acted to protect the neutrality of the civil service.

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a searching point, but the last Labour Government were so long ago that my memory is blurred on the subject.

Mr. Beith: Have any of those Committees discussed the reported plan to send Conservative central office press officers with the Prime Minister on his regional tours? Although the Deputy Prime Minister might defend that plan as ensuring that civil servants do not have to do the political work that the Prime Minister wants to be done, does it not suggest that those tours are electoral campaigning at public expense?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Prime Minister is meticulous in keeping a clear division between his political and his party obligations.

Mr. Duncan: Will the Deputy Prime Minister confirm that he brings to Cabinet Committees an unparalleled experience of business? Does that not contrast with the shadow Chancellor, who, in claiming that he has a family experience of business, is telling the country an almighty whopper?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I must say that, over the years, I have learnt to respect the shadow Chancellor's mother in those matters, rather than the shadow Chancellor himself.

Mr. Prescott: Is the Deputy Prime Minister aware of any other incidents that threaten the impartiality of civil servants? Is he aware of his memorandum to the Prime Minister of 24 July, which was signed by him and which shows that, far from being the person who sorted out the scandal of civil servants being used for party political purposes, he was the man who had the idea to begin with? Is not the truth that the Deputy Prime Minister was caught red-handed trying to subvert the impartiality of the civil service? Instead of ducking, diving and dodging, why does he not pluck up the courage to apologise?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman knows full well that that is a travesty of the truth. The fact is that the memorandum to which he refers makes it clear that Ministers would consider how to ensure that the policies of the Government were best understood—they would decide themselves how that should happen. Sir Robin Butler and I discussed whether it was appropriate for the civil service or for special advisers to be the instruments through which that happened and—rightly so—I agreed with Sir Robin that special advisers were the correct route.

The right hon. Gentleman should be very clear on this point: I will not, and no Minister will, tolerate the politicisation of the civil service in this country. The right hon. Gentleman asked me a straight question: do I know of any other example? I reply in kind: if he can give me another example, I will act to stop it.

Deregulation

3. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many statistical forms and surveys will be abolished as a result of the Government's deregulation initiative. [1299]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Roger Freeman): Our plans to cut the burden of statistical surveys are set out in our response to the recent Osmotherly group report; copies are available in the House Library. We have measured the burden and targeted savings in terms of the compliance costs to business. We will cut those costs by 26 per cent. by the year 2000, creating annual savings of £17.5 million.

Mr. Steen: I welcome the Government's commitment to reducing bureaucracy and cutting red tape. Is my right hon. Friend aware of what the charity commissioners are up to? They have published a 95-page statistical survey which has to be answered by all charities, as a direct result of which Mencap in South Hams has had its audit fee increased from £700 to £2,056. That means that the money raised for the handicapped goes to the accountants.

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I shall certainly look into the matter he has raised concerning the charity commissioners. One of the recommendations of the Osmotherly group with which the Government agree is that, if a small business—one employing fewer than 10 people—is asked to assist in a statistical survey, that should be the only one every three years. That should definitely reduce the burden on small business men.

Mr. Hanson: Does the Chancellor agree that the fact that the deregulation task force is chaired by a prospective Tory candidate and that two other members of that task force are prospective Tory candidates shows that, as well as civil servants, there are also jobs for the boys in other formats?

Mr. Freeman: I pay tribute to the reports of the deregulation task force in past years. The Government

have not agreed with all its recommendations, but the task force does an excellent job. The Labour party would not only discharge all members of the deregulation task force but probably close down the deregulation unit.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while Britain is probably the most deregulated country in the European Union and the deregulation initiative is designed to keep it that way and improve the position, it would be a different story if the Labour party was in power, because it is the party of regulation?

Mr. Freeman: My hon. Friend is right. Labour Front Benchers and the parliamentary Labour party have no interest in deregulation. If a Labour Government were ever elected, we would get more regulations, quangos, commissions and reviews.

Skills Audit

4. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the progress of the skills audit. [1300]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Government published the skills audit in June this year alongside the third competitiveness White Paper. It provides objective information on our education and training performance compared to that of some of our major competitors. This will support our continuing drive to ensure a world-class work force.

Mr. Sutcliffe: Is it not a disgrace and an insult to the long-term unemployed, particularly young unemployed people, that the Government have taken 17 years to deal with skills shortages? Will the Deputy Prime Minister comment on the position facing the printing industry, which he knows well? Although the German and UK printing industries are equivalent in size, last year the number of new entrants in the German industry was 4,000 and the number in the UK industry was only 400. When will we have less rhetoric about intervention and see something really happen to help the long-term unemployed?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate it if I say that I have no working familiarity with the printing industry. I have never been in that industry.

I take seriously the issue that the hon. Gentleman put to me, however, because it is one of the most important issues facing the country. We have been dealing with skills and education deficiencies since the early 1980s, which is why, to take the most obvious example, one in three young people now go on to higher education, as opposed to one in eight when the Conservative party was elected. We have introduced a national curriculum, testing and the publication of results. The skills audit made it clear that the UK is world class, particularly in higher education. We are dealing with areas where we have weaknesses.

Mr. Sykes: Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to remind Opposition Members of the unemployment rates for young people in Spain, Italy, Germany and France compared with the rate in this country? Will he also remind them that the effect of tomorrow's judgment on a 48-hour week, which the Opposition support, is likely to destroy jobs for young people for many months to come?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are determined to continue with our record: we have had five years of economic growth and we are addressing the critical issues of rising standards in education and training.

Mr. Caborn: Will the Deputy Prime Minister answer the questions about the position portrayed by last week's cohesion report from Europe, which clearly showed that we have the lowest productivity rates and have failed to invest in skills and training? I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman revisits the criteria on which the skills audit was based, because they clearly do not give the same answers as Europe gives, which involve very objective criteria.

The Deputy Prime Minister: The explanation is simple: we were so far behind in 1979 that we have not yet caught up. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, however, we have been catching up. The best evidence of that comes from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Monetary Fund, which have clearly stated the pre-eminence of the British economy. Perhaps most eloquent of all is the fact that 40 per cent. of all inward investment in Europe is coming here because world industrialists know that this is the best place in which to invest.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many of the surveys that put us at the bottom of league tables on education or skills are just so much nonsense? In reality, companies that invest in this country believe that we have a highly skilled and educated work force and it is only Opposition Members who want to run Britain down.

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an important point. I do not disagree with the broad approach that he adopts, but everybody knows that, since about 1860, our education standards have not kept pace with those of continental Europe. The difference is that this Government began to do something about it and the gap is closing; in some cases, it has already closed. Apart from our economic achievements, that is one of the most impressive tributes to this Government.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

5. **Ms Hodge:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion of public budgets are currently administered by non–departmental public bodies. [1301]

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Willetts): The proportion of general Government expenditure administered by NDPBs in 1994-95 was 6 per cent.

Ms Hodge: Further to the answers given earlier, will the Minister tell the House whether there is a list of people in NDPBs who are vigorous and attractive proponents of Government policy? If so, how many of them make a financial contribution to the Conservative party?

Mr. Willetts: Appointments to NDPBs are not made on the basis of political activity or affiliation; the key

considerations are aptitude and ability. It is clear that the Labour party wishes to make political capital out of the matter. If Labour has a policy of deliberate non-participation—I refer to a Labour party document—that has nothing to do with us.

Mr. Rowe: Does my hon. Friend accept that the freeing up of a great proportion of the public service from the dead hand of Government Departments has been enormously helpful? Does he also accept that we must ensure that several NDPBs that administer Government policy are freed up further and are not subjected to central Government constraints that prevent them from operating as effectively as they might?

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend probably knows that we have reduced the number of non-departmental public bodies from 2,167 in 1979 to 1,227 now. The reason why the Opposition maintain that the number of quangos has risen is that they regard grant-maintained schools and hospital trusts as quangos. We know that they are not.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, as public service functions are increasingly devolved to NDPBs, agencies and private contractors, it is important that the conventions that underpin democratic accountability are brought up to date and strengthened? Will he undertake, on behalf of the Government, to lay before Parliament in good time—so that Members of Parliament have the opportunity to satisfy themselves that their constituents' interests will be well secured under the Government's proposed new arrangements—the draft contract for contracting out the Benefits Agency medical services?

Mr. Willetts: I am afraid that I cannot comment on the final point, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that we have published a consultation paper on the wider issue with which he began his question—the legal framework governing propriety and accountability arrangements in public bodies. We published that paper in response to the first Nolan report.

Departmental Staff

6. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many staff are currently employed in his office and at what cost; and if he will make a statement. [1303]

Mr. Freeman: There are currently 452 staff in the Office of Public Service. The salary and associated costs for September 1996 totalled £1,468,000.

Mr. Greenway: That is money well spent. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that all his researches show that there can be no cherry-picking from the social chapter and that, if it is implemented, it must be implemented as it is? Does he agree that anyone who pretends that one can choose one bit of the social chapter but not another is misleading his audience, as the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) seems to be trying to do with the Confederation of British Industry?

Mr. Freeman: I find myself in full agreement with my hon. Friend. If one accepts the social chapter, one must accept all its consequences, which would be extremely expensive for the British economy and put people out of work.

Mr. Derek Foster: Is not the Office of Public Service still compiling a list of vigorous and attractive proponents of Government policy who have benefited from Government privatisations and contracting out? Will not Government mouthpieces be rewarded with further contracts, and will not those who refuse suffer? Will the list include businesses that are already big donors to the Tory party, businesses that have former Tory Ministers as directors and businesses that have Tory Members of Parliament as consultants? Is that not a minefield of conflicts of interest—a scandal that should be investigated by Lord Nolan's committee?

Mr. Freeman: The scandal is not as the right hon. Gentleman describes: it is that there should be any attempt to slur the independence of the civil service. There is absolutely no connection whatever between contracts placed after competitive tender on the proper advice of civil servants and those who are political supporters of the Conservative party. It is a scandal to suggest that there is any connection between the two, and I refute that charge absolutely.

Mr. Hawkins: Has my right hon. Friend seen the reports that reinforce the Labour party's hypocrisy? The shadow Secretary of State for Wales has complained about those who serve on bodies in Wales, but it has now been revealed that his party agent accepted such appointments. Does that not demonstrate the Labour party's hypocrisy on such issues?

Mr. Freeman: I am not aware of the case that my hon. Friend cited. However, I repeat to the House what my hon. Friend the Paymaster General said a moment ago: under Sir Len Peach, the new Commissioner for Public Appointments, competence is the only criterion for appointment to any body.

Deregulation

7. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to increase the representation of small businesses on the deregulation task force. [1304]

Mr. Willetts: Five of the 12 members either run small to medium-sized businesses or are involved in small business in other ways.

Mr. Cunningham: By affording small business men so little representation on the task force, does the Minister not confirm that the Labour party, and not the Government, is the friend of small business?

Mr. Willetts: The latest set of appointments to the deregulation task force reveals that the representation of people from small and medium-sized businesses is very good. Our deregulation policy is aimed specifically at helping small businesses. I refer to measures such as the enforcers green card, the Prime Minister's involvement in the "Your Business Matters" conferences and our wider measures designed to ease the burden of accountancy obligations on small businesses.

Mr. John Marshall: Would my hon. Friend care to ask the deregulation task force whether it wants wages to be regulated by a Labour Government through a national minimum wage or our social policy to be regulated from Brussels? If that were to happen, the deregulation task force could be wound up.

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend has put his finger on the key point. The idea that the Labour party can masquerade as the friend of small business when it is committed to the minimum wage and to signing the social chapter is absolutely absurd.

Government Openness

8. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what actions he is taking to promote greater openness in central Government. [1305]

Mr. Freeman: I announced to the House last week by way of written answer that the Government's code of practice on access to Government information will continue to have a central role in setting the clear, recognised standard for providing information both to Parliament and to the public.

Mr. Foulkes: Did my hon. Friend understand that?

Mr. Banks: No, I did not. Two words spring to mind in response to that answer: the first is "bull".

If the Minister is really interested in open government, I have a perfect example of where he could start. There are no fewer than 12 unexploded bombs in my constituency and my constituents would like to know where they are located. Will the Government release that information? It is most unpleasant to think that one may be living on top of an unexploded bomb. As I live in my constituency, there could be one under my house—I would regret that deeply—so there is a certain amount of self-interest involved in my question. Will the Government release that information so that my constituents may know the facts and those unexploded bombs may be dealt with?

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman perhaps has a phobia about not only unexploded bombs but Government plans involving his house. I know that he blames the Deputy Prime Minister personally for the route of the channel tunnel rail link, which I believe passes directly under the hon. Gentleman's bedroom. I am afraid that there is no prospect of changing the route.

The hon. Gentleman's question about unexploded bombs is perfectly serious. The information that he requires is at the Public Record Office. During wartime, it obviously was not possible to trace exactly where all unexploded ordnance landed in London, but I shall convey the hon. Gentleman's concerns to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and see whether the hon. Gentleman can receive a comprehensive reply.

Standards in Public Life

9. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what responsibility he has for the co-ordination and presentation of Government policy on standards in public life. [1307]

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has general responsibility for the workings of the Government and the presentation of their policies. That includes their policies on standards in public life.

Mr. Hughes: That is a helpful answer. Do the Deputy Prime Minister and his colleagues accept that one of the best guarantees of the highest standards in public life is the independence of the civil service, whoever are the Government of the day? Does the Chancellor of the Duchy accept that, in that context, it would be a good policy to entrench the rights of civil servants in law? Does he agree that there must be a proper procedure whereby civil servants who think that they are improperly requested to act by Ministers can go public when they believe that it is in the public interest to do so?

Mr. Freeman: I confirm on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who is technically the Minister for the Civil Service, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and all members of the Government that it is extremely important that our civil service—the best in the world—should not only be independent of any political party, but be seen to be, and provide fearlessly objective advice to Ministers. I firmly believe that, as do all Ministers.

On 1 January, we published a code of practice for civil servants, which I believe has the force of law. It provides a complaints mechanism for civil servants right up to the civil service commissioners, at which stage matters can be made public. That mechanism is available to civil servants if they have concerns. Surely it is better to make concerns and complaints known in that way than to speak to a public newspaper without the facts being properly described.

The Government have an open mind on legislation. At the appropriate time, whether it be in debate or during private conversations, I am happy to carry forward any concerns that the code may not be as effective as some hon. Members believe, and about whether it would be right to incorporate those concerns in legislation. It is—[HON. MEMBERS: "Come on."] I am making a formal offer and repeating what I have said twice before on legislation to protect the civil service.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one development that has slightly tarnished the wonderful reputation of our civil service in recent years is the proliferation of leaks?

Mr. Freeman: The process of good government—I am sure, in all seriousness, that the occupants of the Opposition Front Bench will agree with this—is not served by leaks by anyone, whether he or she is in the civil service, in the public service or anywhere else.

Mr. Ian Greer

10. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the occasions on which he has met Mr. Ian Greer to discuss the presentation of Government policy. [1308]

The Deputy Prime Minister: None.

Mr. MacShane: Is the Deputy Prime Minister aware that, given the flippant way in which he has handled previous questions on the important issue of sleaze this afternoon, few people listening to our proceedings will find it hard to believe that he is not alone among Ministers who met Ian Greer in recent years to discuss funding for the Conservative party and other issues? Can the right hon. Gentleman help us out by taking up the offer that he made on Radio 4 this morning, when he said that there was no evidence available, by publishing his political office diaries and the notes of all his meetings over the past five years?

The Deputy Prime Minister: That is a classic of the technique of the Labour party. I was asked a straight question and I have given the clearest possible answer. I have not met Ian Greer in the circumstances that have been put to me. To go further, I cannot remember meeting Ian Greer for several years. I am not going to say that I have never met him in my life, because I think that I have. However, the idea that I have had any sort of negotiations or dealings with Ian Greer ex officio is absurd. I have given the clearest possible explanation to the House.

I find it deplorable that, when a Minister gives such an assurance, it is immediately suggested that he should publish his diary. I find also—*[Interruption.]* In a democracy, there must be the basic assumption that, if Ministers give assurances at the Dispatch Box, they do so with integrity.

I take the House back only a few minutes when the same point was peddled by the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). If it were possible for special favours to be handed out to those who support the Tory party, that could be done only by civil servants. Ministers do not have the power to indicate preference over contracts. It is only civil servants who could have done that. Therefore, for the Labour party, through its spokesman, to go on and on suggesting that the practice is current is grossly to understate the civil service.

To make an identical point, if that were possible in central Government, it would be possible in local government, where Labour governs a large number of authorities, and it would be as preposterous for me to suggest that it is happening in local government as it is for the Labour party to suggest that it is happening in central Government.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Is it not likely that the person who had very close discussions with Mr. Ian Greer about Government policy was also likely to be a member of the board of Mr. Greer's company—a person who apparently moonlighted as a Front-Bench spokesman for the Labour party in the House of Lords until it sacked her for apparently doing no wrong?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am sure that the Labour party will wish to weigh very carefully whether it wants to inject that sort of witch hunt into British public life. The fact is that it was quite clear that the noble Lady concerned—in the Leader of the Opposition's own words—"had done no wrong". Except, perhaps, one thing: she had become politically embarrassing to the Labour party.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Pakistan

23. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support his Department has given to Pakistan in the past two financial years. [1326]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Dr. Liam Fox): Total bilateral aid to Pakistan, through the Overseas Development Administration, amounted to £28.11 million in 1994-95 and £31.5 million in 1995-96.

Mr. Ainger: Does the Minister agree that the dismissal of any democratically elected Government is a cause for concern? Can he assure the House that he will impress on the Pakistani high commissioner and representatives of the interim Government that they should honour the undertaking that there will be free elections in Pakistan on 3 February? Will he at the same time also raise the concerns of many hon. Members and of those who represent human rights organisations about the reputation that Pakistan has gained in recent years for serious abuses of human rights?

Dr. Fox: I have recently returned from Pakistan, where those very representations about human rights were made extremely clearly on more than one occasion. We believe that the President acted within his constitutional rights. There have been severe accusations made against Mrs. Bhutto's Government in regard to extrajudicial killings and corruption, and we believe that they should be thoroughly investigated. We will encourage the caretaker Government to do everything that they can within their constitutional remit.

Lady Olga Maitland: May I congratulate my hon. Friend on the support that the Government have been giving to Pakistan with its social action programme, especially with regard to literacy schemes for young girls and family planning for married women? I hope that my hon. Friend will confirm that the Government will continue to give that support. I understand that they have in mind a figure of about £30 million over the next five years.

Dr. Fox: It is extremely important that the Pakistani Government's social action programme is given full support, given the support to women and to girls' education that it gives in that particular climate. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that I signed £4.3 million-worth of ODA aid for the Sindh education project, which was designed especially for the education of girls. That is something on which the Government should be congratulated.

Developing Countries (Wages)

24. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance Her Majesty's Government have provided to encourage employers in developing countries which export food and goods to the United Kingdom to pay wages at levels which would help to eradicate poverty; and if he will make a statement. [1328]

Dr. Liam Fox: The best way of improving working conditions and raising wage rates is through economic development. The Government are working to promote this through our aid programme.

Mr. O'Brien: Does the Minister agree that wage rates in the developing world are shockingly low? Does he accept that we in the industrial world should do all in our power to increase those rates to help people out of absolute poverty? Does he support Christian Aid's campaign to change the rules to encourage consumers to shop in stores that apply an ethical policy, so as to help people in the developing world improve conditions and circumstances in their own countries?

Dr. Fox: The hon. Gentleman raises three important points. Ethical shopping is an important part of a free market. I am glad that the Labour party has had a late conversion to that. Good consumer education is extremely important, but it is up to consumers to make a choice; it is not for some central organisation to impose that choice upon them.

One of the main things we can do to reduce poverty is to open up our markets to developing countries. This country has been at the forefront of that.

We should distinguish between extreme abuses of human rights in the labour market and low rates of pay. We, as a Government and as a nation, have always been against exploitation in the labour market. We believe that the International Labour Organisation is the body to monitor that.

Mr. Wilkinson: I appreciate my hon. Friend's comments about the necessity for the United Kingdom to open its markets to the primary produce of developing countries. Would not that be the most effective way of improving living standards, not least for employees on the land in those countries? If that policy is to be properly effective, should not the United Kingdom lead a withdrawal from the common agricultural policy, which militates directly against the food produced in developing countries by imposing barriers throughout Europe?

Dr. Fox: The Government will push for more open markets at the World Trade Organisation summit in Singapore, because that is exactly what we want. We genuinely believe that people in developing countries should be given access to markets, so we should be at the forefront and be giving a lead.

We must continue to examine agricultural subsidies. My hon. Friend is correct in that those subsidies disadvantage developing markets. We have a moral duty to ensure that we do not impose conditions on those markets that make it impossible for them to develop.

Miss Emma Nicholson: If the Minister really believes what he has just said about the morality of those employing people in the developing nations, why do not the British Government support, instead of block, the additional optional protocol to the United Nations declaration on the rights of the child, which was highlighted today by UNICEF in its report on the effects of war on children? It shows that the armed forces in every nation in the world are the largest employers of children of 15 and 16.

Dr. Fox: I would have thought the hon. Lady to be the last person to lecture me or anyone else on Conservative Benches about standing up and saying what we believe in. When we say something, at least we stick by it, and we stick by what is in our election addresses.

Zaire

25. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the Government have to send emergency aid to Zaire. [1330]

27. **Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions he is planning to take in response to the current humanitarian crisis in eastern Zaire; and if he will make a statement. [1332]

Dr. Liam Fox: Regional political and security problems are at the root of the crisis in eastern Zaire. Britain is working urgently with regional leaders, the United Nations, European Union partners and British non-governmental organisations to support a ceasefire, and to allow the substantial relief stocks already available in the region to be delivered to those in need. I would have thought that that was of interest to the House.

Mr. Cunningham: I am sure that the House welcomes the fact that humanitarian aid is beginning to get through to the refugees in Zaire. However, do the Government intend to press for the international tribunal to consider the cases of the perpetrators of genocide? Can the Minister give us more detail about whom that aid is going to?

Dr. Fox: Late this morning, the first convey got through to Goma. Perhaps it would help the hon. Gentleman and the House if I explained briefly the aims of the Government's policy. A central part of our policy must be the voluntary repatriation of Rwandan refugees. We must work with Governments in the region, not attempt to impose a settlement. If an intervention force is required, we believe that it would be preferable if it were organised under the auspices of the United Nations. We wonder about the time scale, because there is a humanitarian crisis. We will have more information this evening when we get reports from the non-governmental organisations that are in Goma. The lack of information is hampering our ability to make plans at the moment.

Mr. Callaghan: I thank the Minister for the reply that he gave my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham). Does he not agree, however, that any future aid must be given to the civilian population and not to armed gangs? Will he make inquiries, with the United Nations and others on the African continent, to ensure that the aid goes to genuine refugees rather than those armed gangs?

Dr. Fox: It is absolutely correct that our aim must be to direct the aid in the way that the hon. Gentleman

suggests, but the practicalities cause us problems. I do not think that any hon. Member would disagree with the aim of the policy, but how we implement it is a different matter. I had discussions with the President of Tanzania today about that very question. It is a vexed question, because the one thing that we do not want to do is return to the status quo ante—the position before the crisis began. That is what we must try to avoid.

Sir John Stanley: Has the Department already introduced a full package of emergency measures, with both a Government component and a component involving relevant British NGOs to the maximum extent, so that, once the security position permits it, the most effective and maximum possible British response can be made?

Dr. Fox: Indeed. We have given more than £130 million bilaterally since 1993, and more through the European Union. It is important to point out, however, that this is not a cheque-writing exercise. About two months' food for about 1.5 million people is currently being stockpiled in Tanzania and Uganda. It is not a matter of getting enough aid there; it is a matter of getting the aid that we currently have in the region to the refugees themselves.

The position is complicated by the fact that the refugees are scattered—we are not entirely sure where they all are—and by the fact that seven disparate groups are currently fighting. It is not as if we were negotiating with one group, and it is not as if the refugees were in one place. First, we must get our refugees to a safe place; then we must find ways of getting the aid that is already there to those people. It is a logistical problem.

Sir Peter Emery: Will my hon. Friend ensure that, if we accede to any request from the United Nations for the use of a military force to enable the provision of aid, it is clearly understood before we do so what the objective of that force will be, what its command structure will be and, indeed, what time scale will be involved in its commitment? Without that, the exercise will be disastrous.

Dr. Fox: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We must have clear, achievable objectives; we must have a clear mandate; we must have a clear time scale; and we must have a clear exit strategy. *[Interruption.]* I hear it said that we have had lots of time to think about it. It is sad that some politicians, and some newspapers, have been painting a terribly simplistic picture of what is in fact a very difficult problem. Not everything that we face can be in black and white: sometimes, in the real world, grown-ups must deal with grey areas that are not as simple as they look.

Ms Short *rose—*

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Ms Short: Thank you for that.

Does the Minister agree that it is essential that we take urgent action in Zaire, but also that we learn from the terrible mistakes that the world community has made over the past two years? Does he agree that our first mistake was our failure to intervene to prevent the genocide, which would surely have been cheaper than all the humanitarian aid that has flowed since? The second major mistake was to allow the perpetrators of the genocide to control access to humanitarian aid.

Does the Minister agree that we now have three objectives—first, to send food directly to the refugees and exclude the armed militia from the process; secondly, to bring the refugees home to Rwanda—

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): He has said all that.

Ms Short: The Minister has not said all that. This is an important matter, not a matter for heckling.

Secondly, we must bring the refugees home to Rwanda, and provide enough human rights monitors to protect them and give them confidence so that they can return home. Thirdly, we must begin the war crimes trials, so that those who organised the genocide are punished. Does the Minister agree that UN forces are needed only to secure those three objectives, and not for any other purpose?

Dr. Fox: I welcome the hon. Lady to her position. Her debut is even later than mine. I have nothing particular to add to what I have already said about the Government's objectives except that—and this echoes what the hon. Lady said—we must try to gain the confidence of the Rwandan refugees to go back. Improving that confidence requires action by the Rwandan Government, and part of that is a belief that those who perpetrated the genocide will be brought to justice.

Mr. Key: Will my hon. Friend resist calls for military intervention and do all that he can to ensure that if military force is necessary it comes from the African continent and that it is, probably, led by the best-equipped and trained army on that continent, that of South Africa? Will he resist to the last calls for British troops to fight their way in and fight their way out?

Dr. Fox: On one side the Government are confronted by those who say, "Whatever you do, you must send troops in quickly for humanitarian reasons." On the other side are those who say, "We must not ever send troops in under any circumstances." A military intervention force would be justified if we believed that it could do a specific job. If we think that that can be done safely, taking into account the security of our armed forces, and that there is an ability to deal successfully with this humanitarian crisis, it must be right, if we can do something, to do it.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

National Audit Office

31. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission how many accountants are employed by the National Audit Office. [1336]

Sir Peter Hordern (Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission): The National Audit Office employs 354 qualified accountants, 64 qualified accounting technicians

and 98 staff who are currently training for professional accountancy qualifications. Those numbers are marginally different from those that I gave my hon. Friend on 13 May.

Mr. Marshall: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. I suggest that some of the 500 or so people to whom he has referred might spend a little time analysing the substantial benefits to be had from compulsory competitive tendering, which Labour wants to get rid of. Is he aware that in Barnet, under the Lib-Lab pact, the contract for refuse collection has gone to an in-house bid although it costs £500,000 more?

Sir Peter Hordern: I am sure that the National Audit Office will continue to examine all ways to save public money and to increase efficiency. As far as I know, the Government do not intend to do away with competitive tendering. On the issue of a change of Government, I do not think that the National Audit Office could enter into unnecessary speculation on an unlikely hypothesis of that kind.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will the right hon. Gentleman be kind enough to draw the attention of the National Audit Office to the behaviour of a retiring Director of Franchising, who has managed to spend £2.25 million of taxpayers' money on success payments to two firms for privatisation consultations without any clear definition of what a success payment really is?

Sir Peter Hordern: I was not aware of that case. If the hon. Lady writes to me, I shall see that she gets a reply.

Sir Terence Higgins: In view of a motion which appears on the Order Paper, may I on my own behalf and, I am sure, on behalf of the members of the Public Accounts Commission and the House generally, express my appreciation to my right hon. Friend for the patient, skilful and efficient way in which he has discharged his obligations as Chairman of the Commission?

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid Budget

26. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to raise the proportion of Britain's gross domestic product allocated to overseas aid. [1331]

Dr. Liam Fox: The proportion of gross national product allocated to development assistance depends on our economic circumstances and competing priorities for funds. The United Kingdom exceeds the United Nations target of providing 1 per cent. of GNP in official and private flows to the developing world.

Mr. Rendel: Given that the Government have proclaimed many times recently that they believe that our economy is one of the strongest in Europe, is it not doubly immoral that at the same time we should be prepared to allow our aid programme to be one of the weakest in Europe?

Dr. Fox: I purposely picked the UN target that the Opposition do not use because our economic success has been based on the use of the free market, on the use of private capital, and that is what we are exporting. The United Kingdom's combined private and official flows, more than 1 per cent. of GNP, are equalled or excelled worldwide only by Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. That is a very good record.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Is not the key point that quality is almost even more important than quantity and that the targeting and quality of British aid are world famous?

Dr. Fox: In the three months that I have enjoyed this portfolio, I have visited nine different countries. In almost every one of them where I have been able to visit an aid project, I have been impressed by how much people who benefit from those projects recognise the quality of United Kingdom aid, which is second to none in quality. My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. It matters where the aid goes. Three quarters of British aid goes to the poorest nations. No one in the House could argue with that.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Investments

32. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what is his current assessment of the value of the Church's investments. [1337]

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners)**:** Commissioners' assets were valued at £2.7 billion in their annual report and accounts for 1995. The commissioners' 1996 figures will be published next year in the annual report for 1996.

Mr. Flynn: Is not the right hon. Gentleman concerned that the Church of England pension fund was discovered to be so actuarially unsound that it threatened to wipe out all the Church's £2.7 billion, that an accountant was recently accused of defrauding the dioceses of London of £250,000, that in the past few years the Church Commissioners have lost £800 million and that, although it was started some 18 months ago, the report on the Ashford great park project has still not been published in a final form? Is it not time that the Church Commissioners got their act together and their house in order on finance?

Mr. Alison: The hon. Gentleman, who is normally, like myself, a peace-loving soul, has fired a gatling gun at me this afternoon. I can deal with only one of his points in the short time available. The pensions bill in the Church of England reflects the great improvements that we have made to the pensions of retired clergy, and the fact that more clergy are retired and drawing pensions than are in active service drawing stipends.

Clergy Salaries

33. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what assessment he has made of the impact of the losses made by the Church Commissioners on property investment between 1989 and 1992 on the salaries of the clergy. [1338]

Mr. Alison: For many years, the proportion of the total stipends cost that was met by the commissioners has

fallen to accommodate rising clergy pension costs, of which I gave the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) a few details. Reductions in the commissioners' contributions have been made to correct an over-distribution in earlier years, not as the result of loss. At the same time, clergy stipends have continued to increase at a rate higher than retail prices index increases.

Mr. Steen: I think that the whole House would agree that losing £800 million on property speculation is a pretty successful thing for anyone to do. What have the Church Commissioners done with their financial advisers? Has the Charity Commission taken an interest in the £800 million that the Church Commissioners have lost over the years?

Mr. Alison: My hon. Friend is not being his usual fair-minded and objective self. The so-called £800 million loss reflects a decrease in property value, which many real property holders and private householders encountered, but I am glad that £600 million of the book loss of about £800 million has already been recouped by changes in property values and by the improvement in the market since the basic loss.

Mr. Bayley: May I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the information that he gave the House on Wednesday during the local government debate that Hagg wood in Dunnington, of which the Church Commissioners own the freehold, has been taken off the market for a period? Is the wood, which is run on a 999-year lease by the Forestry Commission, still off the market and will he give an undertaking that, before any sale of the wood goes ahead, the Church Commissioners will meet the local authority to discuss public access to the wood?

Mr. Alison: The hon. Gentleman and I, apart from being perambulators in the wood, had an exchange across the Floor of the House about this matter last week. The property is off the market at present. The Forestry Commission—the leaseholder—is entirely free to sell the lease if it so wishes. On the matter of consultation, I cannot add anything to what I said to the hon. Gentleman last week, except that I will consider carefully the points that he has made.

Women Priests

34. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what estimate he has made of the number of clergy who will leave the Church of England on the issue of the ordination of women priests; and what estimate he has made of the costs. [1339]

Mr. Alison: The commissioners' records relate only to clergy who have claimed assistance in accordance with the Ordination of Women (Financial Provisions) Measure. At 31 October 1995, a total of 329 clergy had resigned and the commissioners had made payments from their income totalling £8.2 million since 1994. It is difficult to forecast how many more will resign, but the rate has continued to slow. Were the total to rise to 400 resignations, the total gross cost on income is estimated to be about £20 million, spread over a period of up to 20 years.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those are very high figures? Does not most of the money required to fund those payments come from laity? Does he envisage that there will be a cut-off point beyond which no payments will be made to clergy who leave the Church of England over the issue of women priests? Does he think that, anyway, there might be more resignations if there were women bishops, which many are prophesying?

Mr. Alison: My hon. Friend is right to make the point that the laity have to bear the burden of the extra costs. However, they do so voluntarily because their representative body, the General Synod, by an overwhelming majority vote, introduced the very generous package of measures to help clergy to rehabilitate themselves. In fact, there is a built in cut-off point, in that most clergy receive payments over only a three-year period, with further one-off grants related to housing.

Free Trade and Foreign Policy

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the publication of a White Paper entitled "Free Trade and Foreign Policy: A Global Vision", which my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and I are presenting to Parliament jointly today. Copies of the White Paper, together with a summary, have been placed in the Library.

The Government have a vision of global free trade by the year 2020. Both in the European Union and more widely, we will champion the cause of free trade and open markets. An immediate objective will be to persuade the European Union to commit itself to seeking global free trade by 2020.

The first ministerial conference of the World Trade Organisation will take place one month from now in Singapore. My right hon. Friend will represent the United Kingdom. The Government's objectives are wide ranging. They include free trade in services as well as in goods. They extend also to free and open markets for investment and capital flows—issues of particular interest to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and requiring the involvement of a variety of international organisations.

That commitment to global free trade by 2020 should be realised in three stages: first, pressure at Singapore next month for progress in implementing existing commitments, completing continuing negotiations and initiating a further substantial liberalising work programme; secondly, a new round of multilateral trade negotiations to be launched before the end of the century so as to produce results by 2010; and then a final push forward to achieve the target of global free trade by 2020.

The Government are clear that free market policies are best. They produce the greatest economic benefits and, applied internationally, foreign policy benefits as well. The degree of interaction between trade policy and foreign policy is increasing.

Political developments over the last decade have created major new opportunities. The collapse of communism and of state socialism has removed the major ideological obstacle to global extension of the free market. The liberal, democratic, capitalist model is offering new hope to countries that were previously subject to authoritarian state control, not just in central and eastern Europe, but in the developing world. It is important that this new hope placed in the market economy and the democratic system is not disappointed.

Throughout the world, security and stability are an essential precondition for markets to function smoothly. Britain is making a significant contribution to efforts to uphold international peace and security, reflecting our global spread of interests. At the same time, the Government are convinced that free and open markets are themselves a force for peace. Closer trade and economic ties between countries create a community of interest, and the prosperity that they bring provides a powerful incentive to maintain stability and order in international relations.

Britain is better placed than any other nation to champion free trade and open markets on a global scale. We are a merchant nation, and we are active in a wide range of international organisations. Over the next two years, Britain will host the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, in October 1997; assume the presidency of the European Union, in the first half of 1998; and host both the Group of Seven summit of leading industrialised countries and the Europe-Asia summit.

In pursuing our aim of world security and prosperity, we benefit particularly from our position in the Security Council and in key international economic institutions. Our contribution to their work is an effective means of promoting British interests.

By working together on trade issues, the European Union carries greater weight than any member state could hope to do acting individually in difficult negotiations with the United States, Japan and other countries. The EU made a constructive and, in some respects, decisive contribution to the Uruguay round of multilateral trade negotiations, concluded in 1994—for which the Commission team, led by Sir Leon Brittan, deserves much credit. The British Government were consistent then in their support for trade liberalisation and, by working through the EU, we were able to achieve our objectives. We are determined to use our influence in the Union to secure further progress towards global free trade.

Within the European Union, the single market programme already provides for the elimination of all barriers to trade, in both goods and services, and for the elimination of all barriers to investment. It establishes rules and provides for their enforcement. A system of global free trade would have to be broadly similar in nature.

The single market demonstrates what can be achieved on a regional basis. Around the world, countries are entering into regional trading arrangements. Those arrangements hold promise, and it is important that the promise is fulfilled—not only in boosting economic activity within the region concerned, but in contributing to multilateral liberalisation, as the EU has done. Like the EU, many regional arrangements extend in scope beyond trade to other spheres of economic and political co-operation. By fostering dialogue and understanding between neighbouring countries, they help promote stability as well as prosperity.

Britain is an Atlantic as well as a European nation. Success in maintaining security, as well as in building prosperity, over the past 50 years has been rooted in transatlantic co-operation. The joint EU-US action plan, agreed last December, renewed the commitment of both sides to work together for a more stable and prosperous world. It also set out the practical steps needed for development of the transatlantic marketplace. The volume of two-way trade and investment is already massive, with scope to multiply further. The Government are committed to pursuing transatlantic free trade in the context of world trade liberalisation.

The Government believe that by setting the firm target of global free trade by 2020—to be reached in well-defined stages—and by pursuing other liberalising policies, the nations of the world will establish the most favourable environment for progress. Our development assistance programme has an important part to play in creating the conditions necessary for profitable trade and sustained long-term investment. We recognise that poorer countries may need help with adjustment. Over time, however, all stand to gain from being able to trade their way to prosperity.

[Mr. Malcolm Rifkind]

Economic development is also the way in which to deal with other issues of international concern, including environmental and labour standards. The director general of the World Trade Organisation has proposed that the least developed countries should be given a guarantee of tariff-free access for their products, which would bring practical benefits to many of the world's poorest countries. Britain is urging the EU and others to support that initiative.

Open markets provide an important competitive spur, but it is important that all undertakings given to open up market access are honoured in practice. Two Government initiatives—action single market and the trade barriers initiative—aim to secure the elimination of those barriers to trade which obstruct British business in Europe and outside.

We are determined to help British firms to secure the benefits of free and open markets. Supporting business is the largest single activity of our diplomatic posts abroad, accounting for 35 per cent. of our front-line diplomats. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of Trade and Industry work together, through the joint export promotion directorate, to promote exports, which are at an all-time high—twice the level that they were in 1979. Inward investment is also running at record levels—Britain receives one third of all inward investment in the EU.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and I have agreed that, to enhance our inward investment effort further, the Invest in Britain Bureau should operate in a similar way to, and alongside, the joint export promotion directorate. That will strengthen the IBB's role, enabling us in particular to promote international trade and investment at home and overseas in a way that develops a common strategic approach to those issues in different countries and regions.

We are determined to open up new opportunities. Britain is well placed to make the most of them. Our economy is thriving—tax rates are low; social costs are lower than in other comparable countries; labour relations have been transformed; and the social chapter opt-out is necessary to ensure that labour market rigidities are not reintroduced. We are committed to policies to improve competitiveness. The Government are making Britain the enterprise centre of Europe.

Free market policies are the basis for our success. Global free trade represents their extension to the world. We are proposing a plan of action for the next quarter-century.

In parallel, we will work in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the International Monetary Fund and elsewhere for free flows of investment, and to create the right environment for economic growth.

Global free trade by 2020 would bring enormous benefits—political as well as economic. The Government have the vision to set that bold policy objective. It is achievable in the time scale. It is our 2020 vision for the world.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): It is a measure of the bland content of the White Paper that there is much in it with which I can agree. Will the Foreign Secretary accept our agreement with the strong emphasis on Europe? Will he repeat to the House the conclusions of chapter 5, which confirm that the majority of our exports go to the European Union and—a welcome observation—that the European Court of Justice provides valuable machinery to enforce access to the single market? Will he take the opportunity to spell out those facts of our trade life to his party's Euro-sceptics, as he curiously failed to do in his lengthy opening statement?

The key question is: how can the Foreign Secretary justify the cost of printing this compilation of platitudes as a Government White Paper? What reply did the Foreign Secretary give to the letter from Downing street which noted that the Prime Minister could not identify anything new in the White Paper and did not believe that it would be convincing as an action plan? Will the Foreign Secretary accept that those of us who have read the White Paper agree that, for once, the Prime Minister got it right?

Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that the White Paper does not propose a single new post in the commercial sections of our embassies, does not release a penny of new investment in our trade missions and does not come up with a single fresh initiative for supporting British exporters?

The Foreign Secretary claimed that economic development was the way to address concerns on international labour standards. Is he aware that the Government's opposition to a social clause in the general agreement on tariffs and trade puts them to the right not just of most of Europe, but of the Republican majority in Congress? How dare Ministers claim, as the President of the Board of Trade did this morning, that a clause stopping trade in the products of child labour or convict forced labour is somehow protectionism.

Does the Foreign Secretary also recognise that there will be widespread disappointment that the White Paper equivocates over the environment clause in the general agreement on tariffs and trade and that his statement appeared to reject it? Does he agree that it would be intolerable if the rules of the World Trade Organisation were to prevent individual nations from refusing to import products that broke environmental treaties? Does he also recognise that free trade must be balanced by fair trade? Is he aware that the countries of sub-Saharan Africa will lose 3 per cent. of gross domestic product from the latest GATT round? If so, why are the Government cutting overseas aid when it is needed most?

There is an unreality about a Government with five months left to run producing a vision for the year 2020. There was the same lack of reality in the Foreign Secretary's complacency about Britain's trade performance. Does he not know that the OECD's figures reveal that since 1979, the growth by value of British exports has been the lowest of any European member state? Does he not know that Britain's share of the new markets in Asia has fallen by one third over a decade in which Germany, France and Italy have all increased their market share? If he does know that, why has he no proposals to recover the ground that we have lost? How can Britain recover that lost share of export markets when this Government have left Britain third from the bottom in the investment league and second from the bottom in the skills league?

Today's White Paper shows that, after two decades in power, the Government can neither comprehend the extent of their failure nor propose any remedy. This barren White Paper exposes the fact that the Government have run out of ideas and must go as they have run out of time.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman—the right hon. Gentleman; I apologise, but that is the only thing for which I shall apologise to him—has presented a farrago of nonsense in his response to my opening statement. He declined to remind the House that our share of world trade continued to fall under the previous Labour Government and began to stabilise only under the present Administration. He failed to point out that since 1981 our trade has increased faster than that of France or Germany and that our trade increase over the years has been higher per capita than that of either the United States or Japan.

The right hon. Gentleman made an extraordinary statement about free trade needing to be balanced by fair trade. Does he not know that that has been the slogan of the protectionist throughout the ages—it is exactly the kind of line used year after year by those who wish to pay lip service to free trade but who yearn to interfere, control and direct and thereby render a disservice to their countries?

The right hon. Gentleman makes pious remarks about the importance of good labour standards. Of course, we can all share a belief in good labour standards, but the proper place to raise such matters is in the International Labour Organisation. The World Trade Organisation is about trade. Labour standards can properly be raised, as the Government have often emphasised, in the ILO. That is the right and proper way to proceed.

The right hon. Gentleman complains about the content of the White Paper but he should remember that there is a difference between soundbite and strategy. I am not surprised that the Opposition spokesman should be concerned about soundbites, but this document provides a strategy for the nation—indeed, not only for this nation. It also makes a contribution to a historic world debate which will have a crucial effect on the prosperity of people throughout the world in the years to come. As this party and this Government intend to be presiding over the nation's affairs during those years, it is right that we should spell out the facts to the nation.

Sir Timothy Sainsbury (Hove): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on their commitment to free trade. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that that commitment has created an enormous number of jobs in this country, especially because of the effective work of the joint export promotion directorate of the two Departments? I therefore especially welcome the idea that the two Departments will work together more closely on inward investment. Is it not the case that our national success in terms of exports and inward investment—a success that is so often belittled by the Opposition—is due to the great increase in the British economy's productivity and competitiveness since 1979?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, and I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for the work that he did as the United Kingdom's Trade Minister. It is precisely because of the benefits that we have seen from joint action by the Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign Office on export promotion that we have agreed that it would be sensible to have the same degree of co-ordination for the Invest in Britain Bureau; I believe that the same benefits will thereby flow.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): As the representative of the party of free trade, I cannot but welcome the publication of the report, which has so excited my hon. Friends.

I have two serious points for the Foreign Secretary. First, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer have a good record in pressing in the international financial institutions for debt relief for the poorest countries, and the proposal in the White Paper to press the WTO proposal for tariff-free access for the less developed countries could be crucial; I hope that he will underline that in the European Union, because it could go some way towards mitigating the Government's disastrous record on overseas aid.

Secondly, there is one omission in the security section of the White Paper, concerning an area in which we could do with less free trade: the sale of conventional arms. The Foreign Secretary will know that there are already reports that British arms have been found in the current conflict in Zaire, and it is important for the Government to give higher priority to controlling conventional arms sales and not to give the impression, as they sometimes do, that our economy is so impoverished that we cannot afford to be choosy about the countries to which we sell arms. Will he give full support to strengthening the United Nations arms register?

Mr. Rifkind: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's initial comments, representing as he does the last vestiges of a once-liberal party that still refers to itself by that name but has abandoned its liberalism in many respects. I am pleased that he welcomes our free trade objectives. Arms sales are not subject to free trade but are under strict control in all countries, and nowhere more so than in the United Kingdom.

I also welcome the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about the recommendation of Mr. Ruggiero of the World Trade Organisation; I agree that the European Union has an obligation to respond quickly and unequivocally to that proposal of tariff-free access for the exports of the least developed countries. A fundamental debate is continuing in the European Union between the traditional free traders and the traditional protectionists, most of whom are from the Mediterranean countries. I believe that the European Union should be more generous about access to western Europe and especially about the exports of the least developed countries; without that access, such countries will not be able to break out of the poor economic conditions that they currently experience.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, notwithstanding the carping comments of the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the statement is to be widely welcomed? Is not it clear that, although he said in the statement that regional trading groups held promise, they also hold great threats? Is not his initiative extremely well timed to ensure a more global approach to such problems, not only for our country,

[Mr. Tom King]

which depends uniquely on overseas trade in both goods and services, but for every country in the world, because everyone can benefit from greater world trade?

Mr. Rifkind: It is certainly true that regional trading groups such as the Association of South East Asian Nations, the European Union or those in the North American free trade agreement could act against the interests of global free trade by being restrictive; for the most part they have not done so, and I believe that the overall judgment on such groups should be positive.

One has only to ask whether, if NAFTA or the single market did not exist, we would be nearer to or further from the achievement of global free trade; I believe that we would be much further away, because the single market has shown that even the world's most sophisticated economies can sweep away trade barriers and tariff restrictions, thereby increasing prosperity. If the most sophisticated countries can do that, it should be possible for the international community as a whole. With that caveat, I believe that we can welcome such structures.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): The Secretary of State will be aware that the People's Republic of China was one of the signatories to the Uruguay round and has therefore accepted all the arrangements and agreements that it contains. Why then is China not allowed to be a member of the World Trade Organisation? Is not it extraordinary that the world's largest market is not a member of the WTO?

Mr. Rifkind: We look forward to the day when China becomes a member of the World Trade Organisation. However, joining the WTO is not simply a matter of submitting an application form. A country has to be able to demonstrate that it can accept the disciplines and organisations of the WTO, or it will make no contribution to the objective of moving towards global free trade. When China has met those requirements, its admission will be welcome.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Does the White Paper recognise the immense commercial opportunities in the Commonwealth which were recently highlighted by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs? Does it also recognise that an essential catalyst for our successful international trade is to have well-staffed commercial sections in our embassies around the world as well as a highly effective World Service? Therefore, will he give the House an assurance that the current public expenditure round will not produce further short-sighted cuts in the establishment of our commercial sections around the world?

Mr. Rifkind: I very much agree with my right hon. Friend in regard to the importance of Commonwealth markets. Growth in the economy of a developing country does not represent a threat to our economy, but presents an opportunity for new export markets. With regard to the latter part of his question, I endorse the point that he made and I do not envisage any cuts in our overseas representation. I wish to expand our overseas representation and not reduce it as it benefits the United Kingdom. For example, a report by the National Audit Office in south-east Asia showed that for every £1 invested in our export promotion and assistance, we earn £80 in additional exports. That seems pretty good value for money.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Although I support the removal of barriers to world trade, does the Foreign Secretary agree that one of the biggest barriers is corruption, which is devouring such countries as Nigeria, Pakistan and Zaire? What proposals do the Government have to tackle corruption? For example, how will they deal with the Swiss banks that are holding the £5 billion that President Mobuto stole from the people of Zaire? Do they propose to implement the OECD recommendation that countries should not give tax relief on commissions or other bribes to foreign dictators? What do the Government intend to do about corruption?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman refers to important matters, but they are not relevant in the context of developing global free trade. I entirely endorse the view that any steps that can be taken to limit the effects of corruption must deserve our support.

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd (Morecambe and Lunesdale): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that a successful, enterprising and adventurous economy such as Britain should follow the example of other adventurous economies and avoid any restrictions on employment laws as advocated by the Labour party? Will he remind the Labour party that we are against the social chapter and the minimum wage not because we do not want high standards of living, but because we know that that is not the way to achieve them?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, and it is not simply doctrine on our part; it is reflected in the unemployment effects. The fact that unemployment in Britain has been falling for several years while that elsewhere in western Europe has been between 10 per cent. and 25 per cent. and rising must have something to do with the different approach to employment legislation and the additional burdens placed on the wealth creators in those countries.

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): I would have been more impressed had the White Paper been about fair trade rather than free trade. What is the Government's current stance in respect of the eastern Caribbean banana-producing countries? The Foreign Secretary will know that the Americans and the dollar banana countries have taken the European Union to the World Trade Organisation for what they consider to be the anti-competitive position of the European Union. Has the Government's position changed as a result of that statement?

Mr. Rifkind: As it happens, I saw the Prime Minister of Jamaica this morning and he welcomed the support given by the United Kingdom in the very matter to which the hon. Gentleman refers. The United Kingdom is well aware of the sensitivity to the exports of that product of the small island economies to which it is a highly important source of foreign exchange. We recognise the importance of those matters and therefore support the views of the Caribbean countries.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the White Paper is a

reminder that the wider world is just as important to Britain's interests and prosperity in the future as western Europe—perhaps even more so, as the great emerging markets develop and become the markets of the future? Does he agree that several steps are highlighted by the White Paper? First, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) mentioned, we should concentrate much more, in terms of both policy and resources, on developing the Commonwealth network of the great markets of south-east Asia and Africa and putting some effort behind that endeavour. Secondly, we should develop those agencies that encourage the investment and the knowledge-intensive exports from Britain that will be the pattern of the future and make them receptive and friendly to British commerce—I refer to agencies such as the BBC World Service and the British Council.

Thirdly, will my right hon. and learned Friend consider the need to put still more resources into the commercial elements of our diplomatic posts, which can develop those markets in the Commonwealth and Latin America? Finally, will he make sure that his colleagues in the Treasury read the White Paper as carefully as his colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of Trade and Industry?

Mr. Rifkind: On the final part of my right hon. Friend's question, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer played an important part in the drafting of the document and will, I am sure, welcome my right hon. Friend's observations. I agree that many of the United Kingdom's most important markets in years to come will be in other parts of the world. Western Europe remains important, but it is interesting that the growth of imports—and, therefore, demand for our exports—in western Europe has been only 4.5 per cent. over the past five years, whereas it has been 10 per cent. in Asia and 11.5 per cent. in Latin America. We must be more aware than we have been in the past of the crucial importance of south-east Asia, Latin America and other regions as potential markets for significant and substantial export growth.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): What does this beautifully delivered, futuristic guff about free trade actually mean for the economies of the under-developed world throughout the whole of the universe?

Mr. Rifkind: No one would be other than pleased to be given the compliment of having presented a White Paper that can be described in the terms used by the hon. Gentleman. For the developing world, the crucial importance of this document is that developing countries need access for their exports, which means the removal of trade barriers. The third-world countries that have made the most remarkable economic progress in the past 10 years are the countries of south-east Asia and Latin America. It is no coincidence that those are the countries that have done most to sweep away barriers to trade and over-bureaucratisation of their economies and have endorsed and welcomed a capitalist economy in a way that we have long encouraged. The fact that, as a consequence, they are moving out of the third world into the developed world should be an exhortation to all other countries.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Does the Secretary of State agree that this superb and uplifting policy should apply to agriculture as well as to manufacturing trade, observing that the common agricultural policy is the most costly and filthy protection racket ever invented by man?

Mr. Rifkind: Without necessarily endorsing all my hon. Friend's rhetoric, I say that global free trade means exactly that—all free trade, including agriculture. It is not possible to say that we have achieved our objectives unless we extend the policy to goods, services and all products, including agricultural products. That does not mean that there will not have to be continuing support for the rural sector; but that support should not be in the form of tariffs, production subsidies or other measures of that sort, because that interrupts the free trade objective that we have set ourselves.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Will the Foreign Secretary put aside for the moment the party political gloss on his statement and come to terms with the realities? Does he agree that the European Union's trade negotiations with South Africa have less to do with helping South Africa to develop its economy and much more to do with the self-interest and protectionism of the European Union? In the context of those negotiations, does he also agree that proposals rapidly to enforce a total free trade area between Europe and all the countries of the South African customs union will lead to serious consequences, including a 15 per cent. loss in Namibian revenue? How can that help stability if the process is not two way but based on the one-way self-interest of the developed countries?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman refers to the negotiations between the European Union and South Africa, and I entirely agree with him. The United Kingdom was highly critical of the European Union's negotiating policy and we worked closely with the South African Government. When President Mandela was here, he paid tribute to the United Kingdom for standing shoulder to shoulder with South Africa in demanding more generous access in the European Union's negotiating mandate. As the hon. Gentleman takes such a deep interest in those matters, he should have paid tribute to what the Government have been seeking to achieve.

Sir Michael Spicer (South Worcestershire): Although I warmly welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's general attitude towards free trade, does he agree that one of the most protectionist influences in the world nowadays is the European Union? It is a question of not just agriculture but its attitude to eastern European countries. On reflection, does he agree that, far from being a benign influence in the Uruguay round of GATT, the EU was one of the major causes of the massive delays that took place?

Mr. Rifkind: That is the paradox of the European Union. Within its boundaries there has been a greater realisation of genuine free trade than the world has ever known. The single market is a remarkable achievement, which would not have happened without the European Union and which has brought great benefits to the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend is also correct to say that, in terms of the EU's relationship with the rest of the world, there has been a lack of generosity and imagination, which

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has inhibited the development of trade and done a disservice to the developing economies in central and eastern Europe as well as in the third world.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is it not typical of this Tory Government that, after 17 years in power and having wrecked the British economy, they now turn their attention to solving the world's problems? I only hope that the world does not get the same treatment as Britain has had, with 4 million people out of work, the public sector coal industry almost destroyed, the shipbuilding and steel industries down the pan, our manufacturing base reduced by 40 per cent., a trade deficit of £13 billion, a public sector borrowing requirement of £27 billion, and the country up to its neck in debt of £320 billion. And the Government tell the world that it can have a basinful of that? They will need Murdoch with his 2020 global vision to sell that crap.

Mr. Rifkind: I prefer, on these economic matters, the verdict of the International Monetary Fund, which described the condition of the British economy as "enviable".

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that his robust and welcome statement gives a ringing endorsement to two matters: first, to the case for enlargement of the European Union at the earliest possible date; and, secondly, to the case against the cheese-paring economies of his own Department?

Mr. Rifkind: I assure my hon. Friend that my attitude to cheese-paring economies is at least as robust as his. We look forward to developing our assistance to exports and trade. There has been a remarkable change over the past 20 years: one in three of our diplomats overseas now assists British exporters and British industry. That would have been inconceivable even 20 years ago, which shows how our diplomatic effort is combining with our industrial and economic effort in the national interest.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I welcome the global vision as distinct from the purely Eurocentric vision that so many people have pursued in recent years. We should remind ourselves that at least half our trade and 80 per cent. of our investment take place in markets other than those of the European Union.

But are not the right hon. and learned Gentleman and the President of the Board of Trade practising a certain amount of self-deception in the White Paper that they have just announced? They presented it as if the Government had something beyond aspirations to offer, but is it not the case that we long ago abandoned to the European Commission and the European Community the power to do anything to promote our own trade by reducing or raising tariffs, which are the principal direct instruments of influencing trade? Is it not the case that the Government can do virtually nothing to pursue those aspirations, without the prior permission of the European Community and Sir Leon Brittan?

Mr. Rifkind: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong. He implies that the European Union makes trade policy through the workings of the Commission; it does not. When, for example, we were determining a mandate for the negotiations between the European Union and the United States, Sir Leon Brittan had to approach the member Governments and ask them to agree a mandate. There was a great debate between the free traders and the protectionists. I am happy to say that the United Kingdom not only led the free trade case, but won. The mandate that Sir Leon is now negotiating, and which he is happy to negotiate, therefore owes its genesis to Britain and the other member states which successfully argued the free trade case and thereby determined EU policy.

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that the value of United Kingdom exports has increased by 82 per cent. since 1987, and that the value of European Union exports has increased by a similar percentage. He will also be aware, however, that the value of the exports of other OECD countries has increased by 110 per cent. What can we do in Britain to equate to the performance of those other OECD countries?

Mr. Rifkind: My right hon. Friend draws attention to an important challenge for the United Kingdom Over the years since the end of the second world war, Britain's trade as a proportion of total world trade consistently declined until the present Government came into office. Then, in the early 1980s, it stabilised and has remained stable. We have not yet been able to reverse the trend and take an increasing share of world trade. We have stopped the rot, but we have not yet reversed it. That is a crucial challenge for the next few years.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): What vision is there for the future of developing nations that are dependent on import substitution?

Mr. Rifkind: Developing countries, like other nations, must identify their natural areas of strength with regard to their own products. They must be given facilitated access to the markets of the developed world, as the White Paper argues. In that way, just as we have found in Europe and other parts of the world, they can achieve the same prosperity. There is no obvious reason why a country such as Thailand or Singapore should be prosperous, whereas other countries in Asia are not. The fact that some are successful and some are not is explained by the policies that they have pursued.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's repeated emphasis on opportunities for Britain in Latin America. Can we look forward to further emphasis being put, through our trade missions in those countries, on developing their already outstanding record? When my right hon. and learned Friend considers the transatlantic trading community, will he remember Latin America and be a champion for the Mercosur trading market in the councils of the European Union?

Mr. Rifkind: Mercosur, which is a very successful customs union, is a further example of how regional trading groups can provide the building blocks towards a system of global free trade. The United Kingdom, at diplomatic level and through the Department of Trade and

Industry, is giving added emphasis to the potential of Latin America. We will host a major conference on Latin American-British trade early next year, which will give an added impetus to our efforts.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): The Foreign Secretary cannot get away with the answer that he gave to the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel). Successive Tory Foreign Secretaries have said that it is the aim of British foreign policy to promote good government. How does that square with the continual sale of arms to murderous dictatorships such as those in Indonesia and Saudi Arabia?

Mr. Rifkind: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's description of those Governments. We believe that Governments are entitled to protect themselves from external aggression and, on that basis, we provide arms to certain countries. It is an entirely just and appropriate approach and, so far as I am aware, it is what the Labour party claims that it would do.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that many of my constituents owe their jobs to free trade and to the success of the Government's policies. Will he assure the House that the White Paper is designed to ensure that our free trade policies do not result in the importation of unemployment and the sorts of problems that exist in Europe? Our policies must avert such difficulties.

Mr. Rifkind: Britain is perhaps better placed than almost any other country to address the challenges of global free trade. Because the Government have removed existing artificial barriers to wealth promotion in the United Kingdom by reforming the trade unions, removing state subsidies and increasing competitiveness, British companies are more able to face the global challenge than those of almost any other European country. We can take great pride in that achievement.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): This is not a White Paper, but a blue paper. That is very appropriate, given the fact that it is largely a meaningless puff for the Conservative party. We can always identify the serious White Papers because those that are harbingers of legislation do not carry mug shots of Ministers on their front pages. This White Paper contains mug shots of two Ministers.

I have now examined the document, which contains a little about environmental protection. What about protecting the world's scarce resources and endangered species? For example, will the proposals affect the American ban on Mexican tuna that is not dolphin friendly? Will the world's rain forests be protected? What is the future of the ban on the ivory trade? Will those matters be discussed in Singapore? Will the British Government raise them at the conference?

Mr. Rifkind: As to issues of public health or other aspects of public policy, the hon. Gentleman can take great comfort in the fact that proper protection for endangered species will continue and that we shall persist in preventing trade in harmful products. Global free trade refers to the vast majority of goods and services to which those considerations do not apply. When there are special justifications that relate not to trade but to public health, environmental or other matters, they will continue to be taken into account.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): I welcome the emphasis that my right hon. and learned Friend places on the expansion of world trade. We hear much—particularly from Labour Members—about the need to deal with the problem of world poverty. Is it not true that expanding world trade is the right way of dealing with that problem, as is proved by the success of countries such as Malaysia?

Mr. Rifkind: That is absolutely right. It is no coincidence that those countries that have embraced the principles of free trade have enjoyed the greatest increase in prosperity and, therefore, have been able to deal with their domestic poverty problems. If we apply globally the principles that have proved so successful at a national level, we shall achieve the common objective of eliminating fundamental poverty.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): By his panache, the Foreign Secretary has made a rather bland, thin statement sound exciting. However, we remain a little puzzled as to his motives. All states and groups, such as the European Union, the United States or ourselves, can subscribe to grand declarations about free trade. However, when we examine the record of the European Union in relation to South Africa—the British Government have a good record in that area—or that of the United States in relation to Cuba, we see a rather different picture. For example, what are the Government doing to impress upon the United States the absurdity of its embargo on and blockade of Cuba?

Mr. Rifkind: We have unreservedly condemned the United States' action with regard to the Helms-Burton legislation and the Protection of Trading Interests Act 1980, which is on the statute book, protects British companies.

There is a great global debate to be won. Everyone pays lip service to the principle of free trade, but not everyone believes in it. For example, the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) immediately qualified his commitment to free trade by saying that fair trade was needed also. When people talk about the need for fair trade as well as free trade, we can be certain that it means that they do not believe in the former and that they are trying to preserve protectionism. That debate is resolved on Conservative Benches, but the hon. Gentleman could assist us by converting his Front-Bench spokesmen so that they stop trying to be all things to all people.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): May I focus my right hon. and learned Friend's attention on the practical and immediate aspects of British trade policy rather than the grandiloquent and the futuristic? My right hon. and learned Friend intends to use the European Union as the model. Can we therefore take it that the Government will bring about at an early specified date enlargement of the EU to include not only central

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

European countries but countries such as the Baltic states, which deserve to join? Can we take it also that the Government will seek to prevent European policies that militate against free trade, such as the common agricultural policy and the creation of a single European currency within a tightly integrated, centralised and bureaucratic western Europe, which is the exact antithesis of a model for free trade?

Mr. Rifkind: We look forward to the day when the Baltic states join the European Union, as my hon. Friend has recommended. I see the EU as a model with regard to the single market and the elimination of barriers within the EU, but I most certainly do not see it as a model to be followed on the basis of its existing trading relationships with central and eastern European countries and countries of the developing world. In that respect, substantial changes are required of a kind to which the White Paper draws attention.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): In the context of trade within the European Union over the next 20 years, does the Foreign Secretary expect the European Court of Justice to play a judicial role in the resolution of trade disputes among member states? If that European supreme court is to perform that sort of role, it will surely require more resources.

Mr. Rifkind: I do not think that it will. I think that the court's proper role is to adjudicate on disputes involving the treaty. It plays a valuable role with regard to the enforcement of the single market, and that I very much welcome. There are other areas of its activities where we have put forward recommendations for change, which I commend to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): While welcoming the spirit and tone of the White Paper, may I ask my right hon. and learned Friend whether he is aware of the fairly recent acquisition by Bass, near Lichfield, of Holiday Inns in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand? Does he agree that its choice in acquiring the firm was probably the result of not only the good business sense of so doing but the fact that there is a common corporate law in the countries involved, a common economic cycle and a common language? There is also the fact that the gross domestic products of all the other countries far exceed those of the countries of the European Union.

Mr. Rifkind: Whenever countries produce the right conditions to attract investment, it is no surprise that they secure that investment.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): May I welcome the Foreign Secretary's positive language about the International Labour Organisation, which is in some contrast to the position 18 months ago when the Prime Minister and the then Secretary of State for Employment, who is now the Secretary of State for Defence, wanted us to withdraw from the organisation? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that the Government now support the ILO and will abide by its conventions and rulings?

As for child labour, does the Foreign Secretary realise that by so boastfully breaking faith with what the United States wants—which is, if not regulation linked to trade, at least discussion of child labour—he will encourage the US to take unilateral action, which whether on Cuba or on the general system of preferences countries is not the right way forward? Britain should be standing with its allies and insisting that child labour should at least be discussed in the context of the World Trade Organisation.

Mr. Rifkind: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening carefully, he would have heard me say that if issues of labour standards were to be raised, the International Labour Organisation would be the proper forum and not the World Trade Organisation. That is the Government's view. If there is an ILO, it is appropriate to use it for the purpose that we are discussing, and not the WTO, which has a different remit.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that if it were fair and accurate to describe the Indonesian Government as a murderous regime, the Labour Government would not have signed the Hawk trainer contract with them in 1978?

Mr. Rifkind: Not only is that true, but we have had the shadow spokesman on defence saying that a Labour Government would continue to sell arms to Indonesia. That, too, should be borne in mind.

Orders of the Day

Education Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. I must tell the House that between the hours of 7 pm and 9 pm speeches will be limited to 10 minutes.

4.24 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This Education Bill is the latest in a succession of education Bills that have, over the past 17 years, transformed our education system.

The Bill will continue the drive for reform, by carrying forward the basic principles in which we believe—principles that we have applied consistently in our efforts to raise standards in schools.

The first and foremost of those principles is the right of parents to choose the education that they want for their children, and to be able to choose, wherever possible, from a wide range of different types of good schools. That choice and the diversity of schools that we have promoted have been the strength of Conservative policies since 1979. The Bill will enhance them further.

Choice was at the heart of the Education Act 1980. Since then, all our measures have enhanced that choice: through the assisted places scheme; city technology colleges; grant-maintained schools and specialist schools. We have made it easier for schools to introduce an element of selection and have consistently supported Church schools and grammar schools for the choice that they offer parents.

Members of the Labour party have consistently opposed those measures to increase choice and diversity. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) made his intentions clear.

"We must reject selection"—[*Official Report*, 29 October 1996; Vol. 284, c. 461.]

he said, only two weeks ago in the House.

Let us think what that would mean. It would mean the destruction of excellence in grammar schools like those, for example, in Trafford which achieve some of the best A-level results in the country, and which the Labour local education authority has already announced its intention to destroy. The hon. Gentleman intends to destroy excellence in grant-maintained schools—schools such as Parkstone grammar school for girls, in Dorset, and Reading school, where, last year, 100 per cent. of the pupils achieved five or more good GCSEs. For good measure, he intends, in an unprecedented move, to make Church schools subservient to local education authorities—an announcement blithely made with no previous consultation with the Churches. Such schools include Cardinal Vaughan school in Kensington and Lady Margaret school in Fulham—both beacons of excellence.

If that desire to destroy excellence—that vandalism—seems familiar to some hon. Members present, let me remind them that it was last enunciated by the late Anthony Crosland, who expressed his determination to get rid of "every ******* grammar school" in the land. New Labour—same old vandalism.

At the very least, the hon. Member for Brightside intends to limit parents' choice to schools in their own LEA. Did he not make the now famous assertion:

"I am having no truck with middle-class, left-wing parents who preach one thing and send their children outside the area"?

Perhaps we should have sympathy for the hon. Gentleman. It is, after all, his rather thankless task to express the deep division and fundamental contradiction that lies at the heart of Labour policy. Look at the diversity exhibited by leading Labour Members in their choice of school: a grant-maintained school for the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair); a grammar school for the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman); selection for the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle); selective grant-maintained grammar schools for the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright); and crossing the LEA boundary for the hon. Members for Barking (Ms Hodge) and for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). I wonder whether they were the "middle-class left-wing parents" to whom the hon. Member for Brightside referred.

This is Labour Members' policy: choice and diversity for their children, but denial of those choices and opportunities to everyone else's children.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): The Secretary of State talks about choice, but the parents of the children attending the Ridings school had little choice. The local Conservative education spokesman, Councillor John Ford, has now admitted responsibility for pushing through the merger of the two schools that created the Ridings in the face of opposition from the Labour group. He criticised the Minister for delaying the merger, which damaged the school. Will the Secretary of State shoulder some of the blame, by admitting that the highly selective system that is operated in Halifax—and which is supported in the Education Bill—has caused much damage? Everyone else has admitted responsibility—what about the right hon. Lady?

Mrs. Shephard: I wonder whether the hon. Lady has bothered to read the inspector's report on the Ridings school. I also wonder whether she heard the chief education officer, who said:

"The LEA has failed the school."

The clear message from the inspectors of the Ridings school was that the school had weak leadership and management, the governors had not fulfilled their statutory responsibility and the LEA had failed the school. I hope that the hon. Lady has read the inspector's report.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): If there are education black spots, should we not remind the people that the Labour party is responsible for creating and running them? No Government have ever run a school. The local education authorities with the worst examination results are controlled by Labour. The Labour party should apologise to the people for the damage that it has inflicted on countless generations of our country's children.

Mrs. Shephard: Colleagues of Labour Members control nine out of 10 of the local education authorities

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with the worst examination results in the land. Labour Members have opposed all measures to raise standards which have gone through the House, including the setting up of the Office for Standards in Education and the inspectorate. That is a matter of great regret, and should be a matter of shame for them.

The Government intend to go further in widening choice for all parents. Parents want choice, and schools can extend choice by developing their particular strengths.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): When my right hon. Friend talks about choice, does she deplore, as I do, the attitude of the Liberal Democrat-controlled Devon local education authority? It manipulates its school transport policy to ensure that, in rural areas, the only people who can have their children educated at the school of their choice are those who can afford it. Is that what the Liberal Democrats mean by choice?

Mrs. Shephard: Probably. We observe something of the same in Essex.

We believe that schools can extend choice by developing their strengths, whether in teaching particular subjects or in teaching particular pupils. That improves the match between what parents want and what schools offer. It taps into the interest and the commitment of pupils, parents and teachers. It gives each school something special in which it can take pride.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The Secretary of State will be aware of the Gallup poll carried out this year, which showed that 77 per cent. of the parents interviewed did not want selection. How can she say that that is what parents want?

Mrs. Shephard: I am also aware of a poll conducted for the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, which found that the majority of parents were in favour of selection.

Through the Bill, we want to give schools greater freedom to introduce or extend selection and specialisation. I must emphasise that we are giving schools the choice: no school will be obliged to adopt selection.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): Will the Secretary of State tell us how she has explained the Bill to her friends at Westminster, who believe that, as a result, there will be fewer, not more, satisfied parents? Have they misunderstood the Bill, or does the Secretary of State have something further to tell us about it?

Mrs. Shephard: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman. As I said, we are giving schools the choice: no school will be obliged to adopt selection. Many parents, however, want to send their children to selective schools. Existing grammar schools often have around four applications for every place that they offer, and demand is not confined to the few areas with grammar schools. As I said, a recent survey carried out for the Association of Teachers and Lecturers showed that the majority of parents favoured selection.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The right hon. Lady has considerable experience of education—as do I, and as do some of my hon. Friends. Does she not accept that a system of selection is also a system that places labels on the children who are not selected? As she will recall, children live up to the labels that are placed on them. If a large number of children are labelled unsatisfactory, unsuitable or unintelligent, they will act in that manner. We shall then have far more sink schools in Britain, and the country will pay a bitter price.

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman has come in on cue. Opposition Members are bound to start hurling allegations to the effect that we want grammar schools for the few and secondary moderns for the rest—but that, of course, is nonsense.

We are not in the business of imposing two types of school. We have spent the past 17 years introducing a broader diversity than that into the education system. Indeed, the notion of the imposition of two types of school is almost as far from true diversity as is the imposition of just one type of school—which is, of course, the policy of Opposition Members.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): Is not the nub of the issue the fact that we want to give parents the widest possible choice? Is that not what parents want, and is that not evidenced by the parents on the Opposition Benches who exercise the choice?

Mrs. Shephard: It is certainly true that our education policies are popular with some Opposition Members.

We support grammar schools, because they can provide an excellent education geared to stretching the most able. Good for them. Yes, we should like to see more of them, if that is what parents want. Many European countries with highly regarded education systems—including Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland—have selective secondary schools. Why should we deny our children the same opportunities?

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): The Secretary of State has said a good deal about the importance of giving greater opportunities for parental choice. Can she explain, in simple terms, how increased selection will achieve that? In fact, increased selection means that it is the schools that select the pupils, rather than parents selecting the schools for their children.

Mrs. Shephard: I have already explained that we do not intend to impose, for example, a dual system. Schools will be given the opportunity, if they wish, to build on their own strengths and to increase the diversity that already exists in the current system.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, for several decades, educational development has been bedevilled by Opposition Members' refusal to accept that children have different aptitudes and abilities and, as a result, need different treatment?

Mrs. Shephard: That appears to be the view of some Opposition Members, but it is certainly not the view of all of them.

Many excellent schools are not grammar schools. We welcome all types of school; the only uniformity on which we insist is that they should all provide, in their different ways, a good education for their pupils—as my hon. Friend says.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): When the Secretary of State introduced a Bill to allow schools to opt out of local authority control, she allowed parents to have a referendum. Given that it is the children who are now in primary schools who will be affected by selection, does she propose to allow parents of children at primary schools that feed into schools that opt for selection to have a referendum? Does she not realise that that will lead to the same sort of result as the previous referendum, which proved to be a disaster for Government policy?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman says that the introduction of grant-maintained schools was a disaster. He should look at the league tables for the results. Of course, schools that wish to change their admission arrangements will be required to consult and there will be guidance because, obviously, that is essential.

Opposition Members say that as soon as one school becomes selective, its neighbouring schools will become second rate or even sink schools. They should look at what is happening in areas such as Bexley and Buckinghamshire, which have a high proportion of their pupils in grammar schools and where the rate of improvement in GCSE results in the non-selective schools has been faster than the national average.

Opposition Members are ready to make excuses for poor schools and no doubt we shall hear more about that in the debate, but as the chief inspector of schools has said, the most successful secondary schools achieve GCSE results six times as good as the worst performers in similar circumstances. Sadly for Opposition Members, most of those poor performers are in LEAs where Labour has long held sway. Labour's distaste for excellence and high standards is shown also, alas, in its voting record in the House.

We know that if one school changes, its neighbours do not just stand by and watch. They all ask themselves what they can offer to local parents as their distinctive identity and special strength, to ensure that they succeed. Competition between schools is a powerful lever for raising standards.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid–Kent): My right hon. Friend will be aware that before our reforms no school was required to produce an annual report. My experience in Kent is that schools found that as they had to prepare an annual report, they questioned the basis of their teaching, co-operation among departments and their principal selling points. The result has been a marked improvement in quality.

Mrs. Shephard: As my hon. Friend rightly says, the accountability of schools and of the system has been one of the keystones on which we have built all our policies. The Bill encourages and helps schools to respond to parental demand in several ways.

First, the Bill sets thresholds for the percentage of pupils whom school admission authorities may select by ability or aptitude without having to seek central approval. They are 50 per cent. for grant-maintained secondary schools, 30 per cent. for LEA specialist schools in their specialist subjects, and 20 per cent. for other schools.

Secondly, the Bill requires the governing bodies of secondary schools to review annually whether to introduce or extend selection as part of their plan for raising standards and improving service to local parents. No school will be obliged to introduce selection, but every school should consider the issue and report its conclusions to parents.

Thirdly, the Bill gives governors of LEA secondary schools that wish to become fully selective the right to publish their own statutory proposals for central approval if they are blocked by the LEA. Similarly, LEA technology colleges and language colleges, and in future sports and arts colleges, will have a right of appeal against a hostile LEA if they want to use their new freedom to select.

Fourthly, the Funding Agency for Schools will be able to propose setting up new grant-maintained schools in any LEA area and it will be able to pay grant to the promoters of new grant-maintained schools to help them prepare development plans.

Fifthly, the Bill extends the scope of the assisted places scheme as a further enhancement of choice for parents. In future, the scheme will cover independent schools that provide only primary education.

Henry Ford offered customers any colour of car they wanted—as long as it was black. Labour offers parents any type of school they want—as long as it is the local comprehensive. The selection and diversity measures in the Bill will help schools to develop their own special strengths and provide what parents want, which is a good education that suits the individual talents, interests and needs of their children.

As I said, we are committed to the principle of choice and diversity. But we are also committed to the principles of holding schools accountable for what they do, while at the same time giving them maximum freedom and independence in making their own decisions. It is no coincidence that some of the highest standards are to be found where those principles have been taken furthest—that is, in grant-maintained schools.

The grant-maintained programme has been a great success. There are now more than 1,100 grant-maintained schools and they are achieving good results. Fourteen out of the top 32 schools identified by Ofsted are grant-maintained. That is because grant-maintained status gives schools the sense that they, and they alone, are responsible for what they do. They sense that it is now their show and that they have the power to determine their own future. That is central to raising standards, because it unlocks energy, initiative and commitment.

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): Grant-maintained schools got a financial incentive. How can schools compete, such as those in Bradford that were not grant-maintained and which need capital to raise standards, when the Government will not give Bradford and other such cities the money to repair schools that are falling down and which have crumbling roofs? Why are the Government not prepared to raise standards by supporting those schools?

Mrs. Shephard: Grant-maintained schools have the funds that they need to run themselves and are

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independent of their local councils. Of course, it is open to any school in the land to apply for grant-maintained status and the advantages that that brings.

Grant-maintained schools have earned our trust. They know their pupils, their parents and their communities. Unlike Opposition Members, we are prepared to trust them to make their own decisions about how they should develop in response to local needs. In addition to granting the power to select more of their pupils, the Bill enables grant-maintained schools to add nursery classes, sixth forms and boarding facilities and to expand by up to 50 per cent. without central approval.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): How does the Secretary of State square that argument with what has happened in Northumberland, where one school has gone grant-maintained—it was conned into doing that—and where one primary school is apparently now going grant-maintained because there is a threat of closure? That is the only reason why parents accepted the move to the school becoming grant-maintained. The people of Northumberland have more sense than the Secretary of State gives them credit for.

Mrs. Shephard: I am delighted that there are some successful applications for grant-maintained status in Northumberland. I wish them well, apparently unlike the hon. Gentleman.

The Bill requires grant-maintained schools to consult locally and to notify those concerned. It contains safeguards to ensure that, should any problems arise, they can be tackled. Overall, the Bill aims to make grant-maintained schools feel that they have the freedom to get on and make the changes that they want to make in the interests of their pupils and their communities.

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): If the Secretary of State is so keen for schools to have increased control over their own affairs, why did she drop the proposal to increase the delegation of budgets to all schools?

Mrs. Shephard: As I have explained several times in the House—it is a matter of public record—I did that mostly because it would have been unfair to local education authorities that were planning their budgets to introduce the changes without sufficient consultation. That is why we are limiting ourselves to the Bill's provisions. Work on the White Paper proposals is being carried forward.

Opposition hostility to grant-maintained schools is clear. It is extraordinary that they complain that the system is unfair when it is open to any school to apply. All can and many more would but for Labour's hostility. Happily, grant-maintained schools have their champions among Opposition Members, not the least of whom is the Leader of the Opposition. It is curious that he has so little influence on the stated policy of his party. No school, whatever its status, can achieve high standards of education unless it can first achieve high standards of pupil behaviour and discipline.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): My right hon. Friend was asked to apologise for one school and fully answered that request. She will know, as I do, that the new headmaster and his deputy will pull that school out of the fire and restore it, phoenix-like. Other schools under that LEA are local authority, grant-maintained and Church-aided, both by the Church of England and by the Roman Catholic Church, and they have remarkably good records. My right hon. Friend should take credit for some of that, for allowing those schools to go their own way and to plough their own furrow, despite being in the same surroundings as the other unfortunate school.

Mrs. Shephard: I thank my hon. Friend. I firmly believe that accountability and independence help to raise standards in schools, but an orderly environment is also vital if teachers are to teach and if children are to learn. It is not acceptable for children's education to be undermined by an undisciplined and disruptive minority.

We have the chief inspector's word for the fact that most schools are orderly and purposeful. Well-run schools are a tribute to the professionalism of heads and teachers. Most pupils are well behaved and keen to learn. In his last annual report, the chief inspector said:

> "Nine out of ten secondary schools are orderly places and in most relationships are good".

Sadly, however, there are exceptions. More can and should be done to protect schools from pupil disruption and, sometimes, from violence. That is why the Bill contains measures to strengthen schools' ability to promote good behaviour and to take effective action against bad.

First, the Bill requires that all school governing bodies should state their policy on behaviour and discipline. Many already do. It is good practice, which needs to be spread more widely. Head teachers will continue to be responsible for devising, publicising and operating their schools' discipline codes, but they should do so with clearer backing from governing bodies.

Secondly, detention will be more readily available as a sanction. For the first time, schools will be given clear legal authority to detain badly behaved pupils without parental consent. That will remove the absurd risk of prosecution for false imprisonment.

Thirdly, the Bill recognises that fixed-period exclusions give an opportunity to take effective action to tackle a pupil's problems before he or she returns to school. The more flexible use of the 45 days a year for such exclusions will provide that opportunity.

Few would challenge parents' need to have the right to appeal when their child is permanently excluded from school. Clearly, permanent exclusion is a serious step, but the Bill will ensure that the appeals process gives schools the opportunity to present their case, and that the interests of staff and of other pupils are taken properly into account.

School admission authorities should no longer be obliged to admit pupils who have been repeatedly excluded from other schools. The Bill will remove the right to choose a school from parents of children who have been permanently excluded more than once.

Mr. Nicholls: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way to me again. Over the weekend, a teacher telephoned me to say that it was his understanding of the Children Act 1989 that a teacher would be completely incapable of manhandling, even in the mildest way,

a child out of a classroom—with a view, no doubt, to that child being excluded—without laying himself open to prosecution for assault. Can my right hon. Friend clarify that in any way? If she cannot do so this afternoon, will she undertake to clarify it to find out whether that point can be dealt with?

Mrs. Shephard: There certainly are problems. They affect not only teachers, but social workers and people who handle others in any way—for example, people who work in homes for the elderly. Allegations are made of abuse, mishandling and so on. There has always been a problem in relation to that. I cannot clarify that matter further for my hon. Friend at the moment, but he might like to know that teaching organisations have welcomed a code of practice, which the Department has produced with them and with social services departments, clarifying some matters and giving guidance to teachers in such positions.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): Is the right hon. Lady abandoning her personal position on caning?

Mrs. Shephard: The Government's position on corporal punishment remains as I outlined it in the debate on the Gracious Speech. I do not have anything more to add to that, except to say that we have included in the Bill the provisions on discipline that teachers have asked for. They have not asked for a return of corporal punishment and it is therefore not in the Bill.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): Is it not a fact that the Secretary of State has not simply reiterated what she said on 29 October because, since that date, there has been a change in policy? The policy enunciated on 29 October was surely that that was a Government position, that she would adhere to that position even though she disagreed with it and that her Back Benchers would therefore be part of that process. Has there not been since then, over the past few days, a change—a new convention—which, had it applied to the poll tax, would have saved us all much concern and the nation much upheaval and heartache? There can now be a free vote for her Back Benchers, but not for Front Benchers. The Government's position remains firm; that of Back Benchers does not. Is there likely to be another change that will allow her, as well as her Back Benchers, a free vote?

Mrs. Shephard: I have reiterated the Government's position. I said, I think in the debate on the Gracious Speech, that there would be amendments, but that they would not receive Government backing. As hon. Members know, my colleagues on the Back Benches will have a free vote on those issues.

The Bill allows—but does not require—the signing of home-school agreements to be used in the admissions process as a condition of entry. That will encourage, we hope, a constructive relationship between parents and schools, including on discipline, but sanctions on their own are not enough. Pupils with behavioural problems are still entitled to an education and schools need help in dealing with those problems.

The Bill therefore requires every local education authority to publish in full their policies for pupils with behavioural problems. Authorities will have to consult schools and other interests about those policies, which should include effective alternatives to mainstream schools. According to Ofsted, some pupil referral units are not providing satisfactory alternatives. A major factor is often the management. The Bill therefore requires LEAs to establish management committees for such units.

Those measures provide a better framework for dealing with pupil discipline problems. They will bolster the authority of schools, and help to ensure that schools have the support that they need and that individual pupils' behavioural problems are properly tackled.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): The Secretary of State must know that there is a disaster out there with children who have been excluded. The Bill means that other schools will be able to refuse those pupils. There is a total lack of resources for the appropriate alternatives, including one-to-one tuition. If she is serious about that matter, she must provide well-resourced alternatives to a school, including one-to-one tuition for children, who would otherwise be in desperately serious trouble and who would then impose that trouble on the rest of the community.

Mrs. Shephard: Local education authorities are resourced to deal with all the children in their care, whether they are in school or educated outside. The hon. Gentleman will be interested to note, however, that the Bill will require that, in setting out their plans, local education authorities should consult and work with other relevant agencies—again, a provision that has been welcomed by teaching organisations.

I have concentrated on the parts of the Bill dealing with pupil selection, grant-maintained freedoms and school discipline. I now come to the last part of the Bill, which is about raising standards. All the measures in the Bill have that aim. Selection and deregulation will help to create a pattern of schools in which each can develop its own strengths. The discipline measures will help to create an environment in which effective teaching and learning can take place, but the Bill also sets out specific measures to raise standards.

The Bill requires that all primary schools should assess pupils at or around age five to provide a base line from which to plan each child's education, and to measure each child's progress to completing the national curriculum framework, so that we can have a proper measure of what children achieve through the compulsory school years.

Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe (Leigh): How then does the Secretary of State reconcile the raising of standards with the statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer that all teacher pay awards will not be funded centrally? If that is the case, added to the fact that efficiency savings by all local education authorities in Britain are at rock bottom, inevitably, many authorities, especially those in Wigan and Leigh, will be forced to make teacher pay awards through teacher redundancies. How can that possibly raise standards? It will obviously increase teacher share-out and the size of classes, and cut the number of books and expenditure.

Mrs. Shephard: Teachers' pay is of course a matter for the independent School Teachers Review Body. I do not have to tell the hon. Gentleman that authorities have

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been resourced to cope with increases in teachers' pay, as well as with the other matters that concern him. As he mentioned class size, however, he might like to focus just for a moment on the fact that at the Ridings school, the pupil-teacher ratio was 15:1 and that, at Hackney Downs school, it was 8:1. Arguably, those schools have had some of the grossest problems in the land. The only common feature is that they have small-sized classes and are controlled by Labour local education authorities.

The Bill requires that all schools should set targets for improving their performance. We have ambitious targets for raising our education and training achievements at national level and schools must play a part. It is right to require all schools to set targets, as many already do. We shall set a framework for such assessments. Through the Bill, a national framework will be achieved by the merger of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications. The new Qualifications and National Curriculum Authority will oversee the curriculum and assessment in schools, but it will also continue the work of developing a coherent set of courses and qualifications for young people at 16 and beyond, in sixth forms, in further education, in training for employment and, as adults, throughout their working lives.

One of the purposes of education is to prepare young people for their adult working lives. The link between education standards and employment is clear. Graduates are only half as likely to be unemployed as non-graduates. Those with no educational qualifications are three times more likely to be unemployed than those who succeed academically. That message has to be understood by those who underachieve at school and by those who teach them.

When so many options are available in education, training and employment, making the right choice depends increasingly on good careers education and guidance. The Bill will ensure that all 14 to 16-year-olds get a planned programme of careers education. It will also ensure that schools and colleges work closely with the careers service in providing the information and guidance that pupils and students need.

Finally, the Bill extends the powers of Ofsted to inspect the work of local education authorities. The Government want schools to have as much independence as possible, but that still leaves LEAs with a significant role. They will need to show that they can fulfil their role effectively and efficiently.

I have outlined the main provisions of the Bill, on choice and diversity, school discipline and measures to raise standards. I am pleased to see that, in their reasoned amendment, Labour Members appear to endorse the Bill's proposals on discipline and standards. It is a pity that although many of them endorse our proposals on choice and diversity for their own children, they do not espouse them as policies for everyone else's children.

The Opposition have tabled a motion stating that the Bill should be committed to a Special Standing Committee. I shall comment briefly on that. The proposal for a Special Standing Committee is obviously a delaying tactic. The Bill will be subject to thorough scrutiny in Committee in the usual way. Most of the proposals in it have already been the subject of widespread consultation and discussion. In particular, the proposals on choice and diversity were set out in the Government's White Paper, published in June. There is no case for applying Special Standing Committee procedure and I hope that the House will reject that motion.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Would my right hon. Friend be attracted to the idea of having just one meeting of a Special Standing Committee, so that Labour Front Benchers could explain why they support Conservative education policies for their children?

Mrs. Shephard: I intend to spell out some of those Labour supporters in a minute or so.

The Government have a record of achievement in education of which we can be proud. We have put in place an education framework that is delivering the improvement in standards that we need. That framework is fair and sound because it is built on principles of choice and diversity and opportunity for all. Our policies are popular because they work. They are very popular with many in this House. I shall name some of the supporters of our policies—the right hon. Member for Sedgefield and the hon. Members for Peckham, for Walton, for Cannock and Burntwood, for Barking and for Blackburn, to name but a few.The choices that those people have been able to make are proof of the success of our policies, yet those same people represent a party that opposes all those things.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): The right hon. Lady has now twice named me in her list of those whom she suggests support Conservative party policy. Will she explain to the House why, on previous occasions, both she and the Prime Minister have had to withdraw similar allegations about me and the school that my son attends? Those apologies were made both in writing and on the Floor of the House.

Mrs. Shephard: I certainly do not want to offend the hon. Gentleman. If he is sensitive about the school that his child attends, I unreservedly withdraw any allegations that he thinks I may have made. He is clearly sensitive about the matter and I do not want to increase that sensitivity. However, the principle holds good. Members of the Opposition Front-Bench team support our policies for their children, while opposing them for the children of everyone else.

In contrast, we have pursued the same principles with clarity, firmness and increasingly good results for 17 years—choice and diversity for all parents, clear expectations of all pupils and accountability and freedom for all schools, all leading to higher standards and greater opportunities. Those are the principles that we have made our own and applied consistently. Through the Bill, we shall continue to apply them for the benefit of all the children of this country. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.5 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I beg to move, To leave out from "That" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"this House believes that the Education Bill is not an acceptable and effective measure unless it focuses on clauses related to the improvement of discipline, baseline assessment and targets in schools, the regulation of supply teachers, inspection of local education authorities, careers guidance and the merger of the School

Curriculum and Assessment Authority and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications; adds clauses to reduce infant class sizes to a maximum of 30, to introduce a General Teaching Council to promote and regulate the teaching profession and to establish the means to ensure that every 11 year old without a special educational need reaches level 4 in national reading tests; and removes those divisive proposals which reduce parental choice, extend the taxpayers' subsidy of private schools and undermine the efficient planning of school places."

The Opposition have also tabled a motion to commit the Bill to a Special Standing Committee because we believe that it would be sensible for the House to be able to take adequate evidence and to consider the sort of measures that would enhance the Bill and provide a genuine framework for higher standards and discipline in our schools. I fear that the Secretary of State's unwillingness this afternoon to adopt that procedure shows her insecurity, and her uncertainty about what she is promoting.

We are told that the Government are interested in opportunity for all children in our schools, but the Bill simply denies it. We are told that the Tories are interested in the discipline issue, but the Bill does the absolute minimum to resolve it. If they believe in lifting standards crucially for all children and giving choice to all parents, I fear that the diversity that is being denied in the Bill—and the denial of choice in the selective process—undermine the principles that the Government enunciate.

Almost 18 years, 18 separate education measures, endless Secretaries of State, muddle, confusion, withdrawal, recantation, recrimination—we have had all of those. The Government were dug out, by Sir Ron Dearing, of the hole into which they had dug themselves. It has been change after change, yet here we are again, after almost two decades, with a Bill that has two essential features—one is further division and the other is plagiarism.

I again make the offer to the Secretary of State that, if she genuinely wants to promote measures on standards and discipline, and if she wants them on the statute book before the general election, we will co-operate to achieve that—on the basis of the withdrawal of the divisive and undermining policies in the Bill on selection and the extension of elitism.

It is absolutely clear that there is a difference of philosophy on that part of the Bill. The Government want to go back to a bygone era, when only a small elite were eligible and educated to a high standard and level. It was presumed that the majority of the population would be in fairly low-level, low-wage work and that they would not need education to take them through to a university degree and postgraduate qualifications. It was thought unnecessary to educate society—every individual—to the highest possible level, so that just a few students could be selected. In the old days, 20 or 25 per cent. of students were selected, but the percentage now will be only 5 or 6 per cent.—with a grammar school in every town. Only a small percentage of students will be educated to a high standard, the remainder consigned to other schools in other parts of the country.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes; I will in a moment.

The philosophy is very clear. If only a few students are to have access, through selection, to high-quality education and the remainder are to be rejected, we are being offered a world in which we will have a fringe economy on the very edge of Europe. We will be unable and unwilling to take advantage of a new technological era in a global economy, in which major companies can recruit from across the world the expertise and educated excellence they need to do the job. It is a type of trickle down of excellence to the rest—*[Interruption.]* It is a type of aristocratic incontinence that would allow the rest of us to benefit from the excellence provided to a few. Which Conservative Members—who, obviously, have benefited from state education, as have their children—would like to intervene?

Mr. Rowe: The hon. Gentleman is making a wonderful case for his eloquence, but his comments have nothing to do with reality. The Government have increased the proportion of people going to university to one in three, made it very much easier for people to return to education at any stage during their career and, in Kent alone, high schools are already sending children to universities—thus blowing a hole in the hon. Gentleman's argument.

Mr. Blunkett: I thought that, over the past 20 years, comprehensive schools had developed the potential of the individuals who are now taking up higher education. The hon. Gentleman is quite right, however, to say that higher education is now being taken up by more people than were ever given access to grammar schools. There has been a transformation, but a transformation the Government now wish to reverse. They want to go backwards—to another era in which only a few people made it through the trap-door into the land of opportunity. That development is not only socially pernicious, it is a dangerous economic doctrine.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give way in a moment.

Occasionally, in some newspaper leaders, I read the belief expressed that that is the era to which we should return, and that quality must be rationed so that it will not be diluted. That is claptrap of the first order, and everyone who struggled to escape the previous system based on elitism and selection knows it is. Every person who was rejected after taking the 11-plus and who still made it is a living example of why we should not return to a divisive system.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: I will give way to the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), whose interventions I always enjoy.

Mr. Dunn: The hon. Gentleman's use of the word pernicious was interesting. What is more pernicious than living in an area to gain access to a certain school, given that many people will be locked into sending their children to the neighbourhood comprehensive school, as suggested by the Labour party? In the 1960s, we discovered that only parents who could afford to buy a house in the catchment area of a good comprehensive

[Mr. Dunn]

school were able to send their children to that school, thereby denying choice to thousands of disadvantaged children who could not afford to move.

Mr. Blunkett: There are only two ways in which to deal with the problem of parents not being offered choice by their neighbourhood school: first, to lift the standards in those schools dramatically and, secondly, to have a comprehensive and sensible admissions policy that covers the entire area. Let us tackle the issue head on. Every child who is selected for a school that is not currently selective will displace a child who would have attended. It is as simple as that. The statistical and mathematical geniuses on the Conservative Benches must be able to understand that the displacement of one child by another will mean that one child is rejected, and denied entry to the school that he or she would have attended. It is simple.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, because I am interested to hear the mathematical genius who will disprove that fact.

Mr. Brazier: Among the seven secondary schools in the public sector in Canterbury, three are grammar schools and one is a selective school that selects on the basis of technological aptitude. Will the hon. Gentleman give us a straight answer? If he were sitting on the Treasury Bench, would he change back the system in Canterbury so that there were seven comprehensive schools? By selecting children in different ways in different schools, we are grouping them in the most beneficial manner to meet their requirements.

Mr. Blunkett: I do not accept that they are being grouped in a manner that is beneficial for them. I believe that the development of specialisms within schools is perfectly reasonable. The practice can be operated perfectly reasonably within the framework of comprehensive schools, and it can allow schools to share resources and expertise so that they can build on their strengths. Pure competition, however—which the Secretary of State advocated today, and which she mentioned on the "On the Record" programme yesterday—is the very opposite of collaboration, co-operation and allowing schools to share resources, and it flies in the face of the measures that she advocated today.

How did competition help the Ridings school? I challenge the Secretary of State to tell me that. I challenge her to tell me why, if competition is the factor that is improving standards, she blames the local education authority for not intervening to improve and increase standards at that school. Her demand for the authority's intervention—for its proactive intervention and hands-on action—to lift standards is the very antithesis and counterweight to believing that competition will raise standards and provide opportunity. That is an intellectual double-somersault, and she knows that it is.

The Secretary of State cannot tell me—I challenge her to do so—the name of one school in the county of Norfolk that she believes should adopt grammar school status, thereby denying children in villages and towns the opportunity freely to enter the school, as they would have been able to do had the selective system not been imposed. I challenge any Conservative Member to tell me which school—outside areas in which grammar schools and selection already exist—he or she would like to become a grammar school. Which set of parents will be denied the opportunity to send their child to the neighbourhood school?

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Gentleman please explain why it is right that the Leader of the Opposition can send his child to a grant-maintained school, but it is wrong for parents in my constituency of Teignbridge to send their children to a grant-maintained school?

Mr. Blunkett: That is another intellectual problem for Conservative Members. Contrary to what the hon. Gentleman and the Secretary of State have implied, Labour will not deny people the right to make a choice. We will not deny people the right to opt for the school of their choice—quite the opposite. We shall free them from the restraint of having to go through the 11-plus examination to be able to get into the school. What is more—I want to make this clear—in no way are we threatening the ethos or the drive for standards in any school of whatever status. We applaud the work that is being done.

I visited a grant-maintained school in east Thurrock at the end of last week. It is a superb school that is working and sharing with the community, drawing on a deeply deprived area. The school is lifting its standards by its own actions—the quality of the head; the drive for a development plan and for the setting of targets; the lifting of expectations at every level for every pupil. The Secretary of State and I agree on those issues. So why deny all that? Why should the head, the targets, the plans, the lifting of expectations, good classroom teaching, in-service training and better initial teacher training be set aside in the interests of competition and selection? That is what the Secretary of State said for the bulk of her speech this afternoon.

If the flagship Tory borough of Westminster does not believe what the Government say, who does? The October report of Westminster city council says:

> "By giving schools greater freedom to select pupils, one could be seen to be diminishing parents' rights to select schools. Consequently, the result of this could be fewer, rather than more, satisfied parents."

A recent survey in *The Times Educational Supplement* showed that the most rapidly growing problem faced by Conservative Members in their surgeries was dissatisfaction with the changes in school admissions policies.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): The parents at the school in east Thurrock voted clearly for grant-maintained status. Did the Labour party oppose that decision?

Mr. Blunkett: I thought that the real issue was the decision on the choice and preference of parents. The selection process and the division of the community act against preference and choice. We have made it clear that we shall involve parents in decisions when dealing with the historic selective system. That is different from the proposals in the Bill, under which the community will be denied a say on any proposed change in admissions

policy. There will no longer be an obligation for the publication of the statutory requirements that we have all taken for granted to ensure that the actions of one school do not damage another. We all know that a decision taken by one school can have a dramatic impact on the intake—and therefore the working—of a neighbouring school.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I should like to clarify the position of Gable Hall school, which my hon. Friend visited last week. The school is in the borough of Thurrock, but will be in the new constituency of Basildon. The reintroduction of selection would be a major disadvantage to the pupils of Basildon and Thurrock and would cause immense problems for schools still under local education authorities and for those grant-maintained schools that have successfully structured themselves on the basis of there being no selection.

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend is entirely right. That is why we want to avoid the rest of Britain having to face the shambles that the London borough of Bromley is facing under the Conservatives. The Conservative chairman of education in Bromley wrote to the Secretary of State in August, saying:

"The greater the extent of selection by ability, the greater the limits on choice for all except parents of the brightest children. The opportunities available to the less able or to those who happen to live further away from the school than most will be reduced in direct proportion to the increased opportunities of more able children and their parents."

I agree with the chairman of education in Bromley. Goodness knows, he ought to know what sort of shambles he will be facing when the extension of partial selection takes place. Children will be denied entry to the school that they would expect to go to.

I have a letter from a mother in Croydon, who explains that she took her daughter to an open day at the school of her choice a week or two ago. Her child's primary school has fed into that secondary school for many years. They looked forward to her going there with her older siblings and with the children she had played with when growing up. When they arrived, they were handed a pamphlet, and they suddenly discovered that the school intended to select 15 per cent. of its pupils. She said:

"The bombshell fell when we sat down to listen to the head teacher's speech and had an opportunity to look at the Edenham brochure that had been handed to us when we first arrived."

She describes how she had to explain to her daughter that, instead of going there automatically because she is from the catchment area—never mind about preference—she might be denied a place because they live on the fringe of the area and the 15 per cent. might apply from schools from over the boundary and push her out.

Frankly, that is a disgrace. It is a disgrace that we should have to put up with the waste of parliamentary time in going backwards to a bygone era; it is a waste that we cannot concentrate instead on the issues on which we agree.

We agree on strengthening discipline. Some of us are slightly taken aback to discover that, after 18 years of Conservative government, detention is not compulsory. If I had known that when I was at school, I could have saved myself hours of difficulty sitting through it, but I welcome the belated decision to ensure that, after all those years, people will not be prosecuted and locked up for having held me in detention. We had better make the measure retrospective, or somebody will sue the Department for Education and Employment. I offer my co-operation in making the measure retrospective.

We ought to be addressing how best to intervene at the earliest possible stage. We do not just agree with the Government on base line assessment, we promoted it. Birmingham city council was in the forefront. We not only agree with most of the policies in the rest of the Bill, we invented them, promoting them for many years in some cases.

I welcome the extension of the maximum period of exclusion from 15 days to 45 days. On 2 April, I suggested that a term should be the maximum. Ten days later—and three weeks shorter—the Secretary of State adopted the policy. That is welcome. More bipartisan approaches, with the Conservatives adopting our policies, will help a lot because, when we get into power next spring, many of the policies will already be in place, saving me a lot of time and trouble adding them to our first major Bill after taking office.

The Conservatives can by all means come on board. Let them get on board with standards, base line assessment and targets. Let them get on board with head teacher training and a much more sensible unification of vocational and academic education than currently proposed by the Secretary of State. Let us unite the National Council for Vocational Qualifications and the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority in a way that genuinely tries to unite high-quality vocational and academic education, rather than divide them. That is why we cannot have a free market in post-16 education. It is why some of the measures providing for a free-for-all from grant-maintained schools on the establishment of sixth forms do not make educational sense, never mind ideological sense. We must all pull together to promote measures that genuinely increase standards and the likelihood of opportunity for all children. We therefore offer our backing to provide a free passage for those measures in the Bill that are sensible, and ensure that some children are not denied opportunity at the expense of others.

We ask the Government to abandon the proposal to extend the assisted places scheme to primary and prep school children. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) summed up the issue succinctly when he said:

"There are two things wrong with the assisted places scheme: the principle and the practice."

I think that he got it in one. He continued:

"As I understand it, the principle is supposed to be about bridging the enormous divide between state and private schools; it does not bridge the divide, but widens it".

That is absolutely true. He went on—in words that I would never have dared use as an advocate of new Labour—to speak of the way in which, under the assisted places scheme, the crumbs from the table are

"intercepted by the agile hands of the middle classes."—[*Official Report*, 29 October 1996; Vol. 284, c. 491-92.]

That is indeed the case.

Let us abandon the divisions and those things that simply lead up a blind alley to nowhere. I ask the Government to join us in ensuring that we can implement—through lower class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds, through the introduction of a general teaching council and by backing steps taken by teachers,

[Mr. Blunkett]

parents, governors and LEAs—measures to lift the standard of education for all our children in every school in every community in Britain.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Before I call the next hon. Member, I remind the House that Madam Speaker has placed a limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 7 pm and 9 pm.

5.31 pm

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): Clauses 20 and 21 impose important new duties on head teachers and governing bodies of maintained schools generally to prescribe in written form and to enforce acceptable norms and standards of pupil behaviour in schools. It is perhaps a coincidence—if so, it is a helpful one—that we should be debating the Bill as a national consultation is taking place on the conclusions and recommendations of the so-called National Forum for Values in Education in the Community.

The forum was convened on the initiative of Dr. Nick Tate, the chief executive of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority. Although I do not agree with everything in the report, his initiative is to be warmly commended. The initiative was in fact a follow-up to an important SCAA conference in January this year. Dr. Tate's speech on that occasion was to some extent the forerunner and inspiration for the Archbishop of Canterbury's own initiative on 5 July in introducing the House of Lords debate on society's moral and spiritual well-being.

Section 1 of the foundation Education Reform Act 1988 insists that the school curriculum prepares pupils for the

"opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life."

It is against the background of what I hope my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will regard as a supportive and sympathetic appraisal of Dr. Tate, SCAA and the national forum that I must nevertheless express my strong criticism of SCAA and the forum for taking an unacceptably negative and mealy-mouthed approach to that adult experience known as the family and married life for which the school curriculum and school standards should be preparing children.

My right hon. Friend will know that five members of the forum's parent-governor group, including Mr. Guy Hordern who is well known in Birmingham, wanted a specific reference made in the report to the cardinal contribution made by the family, sustained by marriage, in creating and transmitting virtues—"virtues" is probably a better word than "values". Mr. Hordern and his minority group wanted to include the words:

"The most important relationships throughout life are those experienced within the immediate and extended family. Children should be nurtured and developed within a stable, moral and loving home environment with preferably both mother and father present in a happy marriage relationship. Marriage and parenting successfully undertaken are very creative of good values in adults and children."

Almost unbelievably, the proposal was disallowed. Its repudiation in the forum's report was dealt with in the following words:

"Four members of one group wanted to include a fifth area for the family, with the emphasis on the need for heterosexual life-long marriage. However this proposal was not accepted by other members on the grounds that it was not a true representation of the analysis of documentation"—

whatever that bizarre observation may mean—

"and the belief that neither they nor SCAA had the authority to prescribe on family structures. However, all members were eager to stress the quality of family life."

I hope that it is reasonable to claim that we in the House and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State do have the right and authority to prescribe on family structures. I hope, too, that my right hon. Friend will agree with my stricture that the repudiation of Guy Hordern's advocacy of the norms of marriage and family life is mealy mouthed and unacceptable. I was deeply relieved when, on 27 October, I heard my right hon. Friend specifically criticise the deletion and omission of the minority group's references to marriage in the forum's report. I very much hope that she will stick to her guns and continue to have the splendid courage of her convictions, which she manifested in her initial reaction to the forum's report.

Should she need any supportive arguments, I remind my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—in an effort to strengthen her hand in the lead that she has given—that marriage is a practice and condition supported and sustained by a powerful tripod of Church, state and common sense. I also remind her of the words of the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, who said:

"Cohabitation is not and cannot be marriage in all but name. Marriage is not cohabitation. Marriage is the institution which is at the heart of a good society and let us not be reluctant to say so. I do not say this in condemnation. I say it as an invitation to a better way."

I also remind my right hon. Friend of the key facts of family life. The Family Policies Study Centre, for example, showed in a 1995 survey that 71 per cent. of children live with their married father and mother; 3 per cent. of children live with a cohabiting mother and father at any one time, and almost all cohabiting couples get married after they have a child; 17 per cent. live in a lone mother household; 7 per cent. live with their mother and stepfather, married in the case of 4 per cent. and cohabiting in the case of 3 per cent.; and 2 per cent. live in a lone father or other such household.

It is perhaps not surprising, given those figures, that a Gallup poll in *The Sunday Telegraph* of 3 November showed that 75 per cent. of the public believe that schools should teach children that marriage is a good thing. According to the Audience Selection poll in *The People*, 73 per cent. believe that moral teaching in schools should focus on marriage and the traditional family.

On the role of the state, my right hon. Friend will recall that, since the introduction of the so-called wife's allowance in 1918, our system of taxation has deliberately singled out marriage for specific recognition and support, as in the married man's allowance, the wife's earned income relief and, since 1990, the married couple's allowance. Both Lord Lawson and the present Chancellor specifically rejected the view that the tax system should pay no regard to marriage.

The latest significant contribution to state support for marriage comes from my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor who, in a recent press release, stated:

"The Government's commitment to the institution of marriage is now enshrined in the Family Law Act 1996. It is one which I, personally, wholeheartedly endorse. I am therefore particularly pleased to announce a programme which will provide practical help and support for people who are preparing for marriage, and support for those whose marriage is in difficulty."

I cannot think of a more clear-headed and specific endorsement of the concept of marriage than the Government's providing substantial budgetary support for people preparing for marriage and for those with marriages in difficulty; and yet SCAA, in the consultation process following the forum, has not had the guts and the common sense to recognise that everybody—but everybody—believes that the only rational and sensible way to bring up children is to encourage marriage and the married state.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will insist that any recommendations or directives sent to schools in accordance with the Education Reform Act 1988, requiring the curriculum to prepare children for adult life, should not hesitate to highlight, recognise and encourage marriage as the basis for a stable, loving, creative and enjoyable family life.

5.42 pm

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): I am tempted to follow the right hon. Gentleman and discuss family life; I shall not do so, but I suggest that he should choose his words carefully, because a child whose family does not conform to his specific concept of what marriage and family life should be may get the idea that there is something wrong with that family. Rightly or wrongly, many children today have a different experience of family life from that described by the right hon. Gentleman; we would do them enormous damage if we implied that their way of life was not totally acceptable.

Mr. Brazier: Will the hon. Lady consider for a moment where her argument leads? What would she say to a friend of mine who was brought up in a home with a violently alcoholic father? Does she think that children should not be taught that it is wrong to be an alcoholic and to beat up children? That is where her argument is taking her.

Miss Lestor: I do not see the analogy. I am talking not about drunken fathers, but about children who are not in what is regarded as, but never really was, a traditional family, and who may be given the impression that there is something wrong with their situation. When children are alienated from society and people make judgments about them, problems are created. Children must be told that, whatever their family structure and however it is perceived, their family is important.

When I first came to the House more than 30 years ago—I was extremely young—I was told that if I stayed long enough I would hear the same arguments again. That has indeed happened tonight. I am sorry that the Secretary of State has left, because the arguments that we are hearing about grammar schools and comprehensive education and about selection and choice are exactly the same as the arguments that were made against those of us who were involved with the campaign for the advancement of state education and with the changeover to a non-selective system. We should not forget that we have Lady Thatcher to thank for closing more grammar schools than any other Minister.

We were told, and we have been told again tonight, that choice and preference are the same thing, and that under a comprehensive system with no grammar schools parents would lose their right to choose. The words preference and choice are bandied about as if they meant the same thing, but they do not: many parents express a preference for a certain type of school without having that preference realised.

The history of grammar schools has shown that the only parents who got their choice were those whose children were lucky enough to be selected for that choice. Many parents who said that they preferred a certain school were told that it was full. That is happening now, with selection coming in by the back door and excluding large numbers of pupils from the parents' school of choice.

An interesting book on the history of comprehensive education in this country has just come out. It is by my friend Caroline Benn and Clyde Chitty and is worth reading by those who doubt the success of the comprehensive system.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North–East): It is not a very objective account.

Miss Lestor: I believe that it is an objective account. Has the hon. Gentleman read it?

Mr. Congdon: I have heard about it.

Miss Lestor: Clearly the hon. Gentleman did not go to a comprehensive school, so he probably cannot manage the book.

In England and Wales, 90 per cent. of children attend comprehensive schools; in Scotland, as we all know, all schools are comprehensive. We have only about 150 grammar schools left, and research has shown that the academic achievement of comprehensive schools is increasing all the time, as is their diversity. Over the years, different comprehensive schools have developed strengths in different areas, which is something that we all wanted, but the moment that we start creaming pupils off and making a judgment that certain children are likely to be more able and should have the opportunity to be selected for a different type of education, we shall weaken the possible academic achievements of the comprehensives.

Moreover—and this is an argument that we have not heard in the House for a long time—people who believed that they could judge by an examination or test which children would be the high fliers have often been proved wrong, and more resources used to be dedicated to those children who were picked, to ensure that the prophecy was fulfilled. I would deeply regret a return to wider selection.

There is a confusion between preference and choice. If schools are allowed to select a higher proportion of pupils, only the parents of children who pass the selection test will have a choice. That process affects other schools. The process of creaming off the best creates difficulties. I find it unbelievable that we are considering returning to a system that proved deficient in offering most of our children opportunities when the system of comprehensive education has been so successful.

Having expressed my opposition to selection and my fear of it, I shall now deal with exclusions and discipline in our schools. I am aware of the Secretary of State's views on discipline and I know that we shall have the opportunity to debate the matter in detail, so I shall not say much about corporal punishment and its place—

[Miss Lestor]

or lack of it, I hope—in our school system. Instead I shall follow up what my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) said about exclusions.

I have every sympathy with schools and teachers who are called upon to deal with disruptive pupils. We are all aware of the difficulties that are involved. However, we should consider why those children are disruptive and the problems that they face. I imagine that poor little Rikki Neave, who was brutally killed and suffered so appallingly at the hands of his mother, was a disruptive pupil. Had he grown up, I am sure that he would have been described as a menace to society, but who would have remembered his background or his history?

We need to look more closely at why certain children are so disruptive. There are many explanations that I hope we will debate in some detail. It is easy to write off those children by looking at the end product without considering their background. Given what has happened to some disruptive children and what they have experienced, we should take great care when we talk about corporal punishment. The kids who will be bashed and caned will be mostly the ones who are already being bashed and battered. That is the big dilemma about discipline in schools.

I should like to refer to some research that Dr. Carl Parsons of Christ Church college, Canterbury recently presented to the Association of Metropolitan Authorities conference. He found that exclusions are a small, but growing problem. There was an 8 per cent. rise in exclusions last year and an 11 per cent. rise the year before. In 1995-96, one in 2,300 primary school children, one in 240 secondary school children and one in 100 secondary school children in London were permanently excluded. Inner London schools exclude many more pupils than elsewhere. Exclusions are mostly of boys aged between nine and 11. The research shows that there is a strong link between exclusions and factors of deprivation. I believe that there is a strong link between exclusions and a lack of hope for the future.

At secondary level, 40 per cent. of excluded children are sent to pupil referral units and 27 per cent. receive home tuition. At primary level, 25 per cent. of excluded children attend pupil referral units and 40 per cent. receive home tuition. There is a six-week delay to get excluded pupils into pupil referral units or home tuition, which amounts to two hours per week. If parents who took their children out of education offered them only two hours' tuition a week, they would probably be prosecuted. They would be told that they were providing insufficient education. It seems to me and to many of those young people—difficult as they are—that we have given up on them and abandoned them. We cannot afford to do that.

The reason why the problem is growing is complex. I have mentioned one or two factors. The national curriculum has not helped. In the past, there were outlets for many disruptive pupils such as woodwork or playing sports for long periods. Today, local management of schools and league tables have resulted in more competition between schools and, in some instances, the need to exclude disruptive pupils because they drag down the school's reputation. The general lack of resources means that there is less money to provide back-up facilities and specialist services such as social workers and educational psychologists.

If the pattern of exclusion continues and children are taken out of education because their schools can no longer cope with them, we have to offer them more. If we do not, they will realise what some already say about them—that they are useless and they might as well leave school at 12 or 14 as they will never achieve anything. We are not providing resources for them or taking them seriously.

If exclusions continue, we must ensure that excluded children are given further opportunities. For many of them, it is a phase that will pass. Many of them get over it and return to education, but the tragedy is that one third of excluded children become known to the police within two years. That is because they are not occupied, so they wander the streets. It was never the intention that the behaviour of excluded children should become worse and that they should become known to the police, but that is what is happening.

The House must take seriously the issue of exclusion and what happens to disruptive pupils. I welcome the proposals that involve standards of behaviour and schools knowing what to expect of pupils. That is a sound policy and no one would disagree with it. Children need to know where they are and what is expected of them. Our expectations should be high. However, I believe profoundly that if there is more selection and some children are labelled more successful than others, the feeling of worthlessness will extend to many more children and resources will be directed not towards those who need them most, but towards those who are considered successful.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, I was told that if I was here long enough I would hear the same arguments repeated. I have heard them tonight and I find that very sad.

5.56 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) is not in his place. He asked about the Ridings school and the local education authority. The answer to his question was on "Panorama" last Monday. I saw that programme and the answer given by the director of education was:

"The local authority failed The Ridings school."

The director of education blamed not the Government, but the local authority.

I welcome the Education Bill because it gives schools much greater power to select pupils by way of ability or aptitude without the need to obtain central approval. The Government do not insist that every school has a selective intake. The Bill simply ensures that local people, through the school governing bodies, have a right to decide whether to introduce a degree of selection.

My constituency has grammar schools and I know from personal experience just how successful they are. Those grammar schools have an influence far beyond their immediate environment. They influence the primary schools that are subject to the rigour of an 11-plus examination and to parents, who undoubtedly have certain expectations. The effect of selection and the added rigour results in higher standards in primary schools, which feed through to the secondary schools. The other secondary schools do not operate in some educational vacuum, but derive benefit from the added rigour. Therefore, the effect of the 11-plus and selection is felt throughout the school chain and not simply in the grammar schools.

Clauses 54 to 57 make provision for the chief inspector of schools to arrange for the inspection of local education authorities. I welcome that new power. For some time, I have become increasingly concerned about the effectiveness of LEAs, which were first established in 1902. Since then, many changes have taken place within the education system and society at large. It is now time for the powers and responsibilities of LEAs to be the subject of a searching examination. Those four clauses go part way to meet my views. However, I have considerable reservations.

If an LEA is found to be failing, it is required to publish an action plan, but that does not go nearly far enough. The Ofsted report and the action plan should be the subject of a 90-minute debate in the House of Commons, which should take place in Government time. An Adjournment debate raised by an individual Member of Parliament is not long enough or good enough for the issues to be thoroughly explored; but a prime-time debate on a failing LEA would have the effect of concentrating the local authority's collective mind to a degree that might not otherwise occur.

If it is argued that there is insufficient parliamentary will or parliamentary time, I have an alternative suggestion: that the Select Committee on Education and Employment be required to consider the Ofsted report and the action plan and to ask witnesses from the LEA to attend, answer for their failures and explain their actions. I advance those two suggestions because the Bill as it stands does not have sufficient teeth to ensure that the Ofsted report is thoroughly debated and the action plan is properly implemented. It is not enough for the report and the action plan to be published in the pious hope that something might be done.

It would be a mistake to assume that all LEAs can be shamed into real and positive action. Those who doubt that need only look at the local ombudsman's reports and remember that those reports are not always accepted by local authorities. It is factually correct to say that, in a minority of cases, the ombudsman's report is not actioned by the council that is subject to criticism.

Like many Conservative Members, I get fed up with Opposition Members blaming the Government for every single error or omission in the nation's schools—that point was also made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State during her remarks. Labour Members conveniently forget that they and their Liberal allies control the overwhelming majority of LEAs and that it is LEAs that are responsible for administering the nation's schools. They exert a fundamental influence over the character of schools and the way in which education is delivered. As Chris Woodhead said:

"What counts is not class size but teaching method."

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am delighted to have the support of Conservative Members.

Opposition Members cannot have it both ways. On the one hand, they say that grant-maintained status has failed because the majority of the nation's schools are still controlled by LEAs; but on the other hand they say that, when an LEA school fails, it is the fault of the Department for Education and Employment. Heads the LEA wins, tails the Government lose.

Mr. Kilfoyle: The hon. Gentleman referred to the Ridings school which, we must remember, was formed after an amalgamation under a Conservative local authority. Does he agree with the Conservative education spokesman, Councillor John Ford, who was quoted in the Halifax *Evening Courier* of 7 November as saying:

"The problem was that the Education Secretary took nearly 12 months to approve the scheme which undermined the establishment of the new school and made it difficult for parents"?

Mr. Pawsey: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but I am not impressed. The whole case pivots on what the director of education said:

"The local authority failed The Ridings school."

The hon. Gentleman can ask me as many questions as he likes on that subject, but I shall continue to give him the answer which I heard on "Panorama".

Staying on the subject of local authorities, I am increasingly of the view that they are extremely expensive. A paper on school funding produced by the Centre for Policy Studies showed that, of the national schools budget, £12 billion goes to schools and about £4 billion to LEAs. The total proportion of funds deducted by LEAs ranges from 26 per cent. in Havering to 39 per cent. in Barking and in Dagenham. It is argued that LEAs keep £3 for every £7 that they distribute among their schools. An average of £594 a year is withheld by LEAs for every pupil in the country. That is a truly staggering amount.

That problem occurs because there are three separate budgets: the general schools budget, the potential schools budget and the aggregated schools budget. The complexity of those three budgets means that the whole system of school funding is opaque. Clearly, it would be of substantial benefit to the House, to the country and, of course, to the children of the country if school funding were made more transparent and understandable.

Mr. Don Foster: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pawsey: I am delighted to receive the assent of the hon. Gentleman, who is the Liberal spokesman on this subject. He agrees with Conservative Members fairly infrequently, but it is always good when a sinner returns to the fold.

The problem is not so much the lack of funds, as Opposition Members continually allege, but that funds do not go where they are intended to go—to classrooms. There is still far too much LEA holdback.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State acknowledged the disciplinary problems in some of the nation's schools. She now requires schools to publish their policy on discipline and schools will be empowered to give detention without first obtaining parental consent. That is a positive move in the right direction, but it does not go far enough. I want a new clause to be added to the Bill that would make it possible for the home-school contract to contain a reference to corporal punishment.

I now come to the point that was eloquently made by the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor), who concentrated on the subject of exclusion for much of her speech. I found myself in agreement with at least some of her remarks. I believe, as she does, that exclusions damage children. In my view, but clearly not in hers, exclusions damage children far more than being caned would. That point was confirmed in a recent poll that

[Mr. Pawsey]

showed that 68 per cent. of those interviewed believed that corporal punishment should be restored to the nation's schools.

It should be remembered—again, I echo a point made by the hon. Member for Eccles—that exclusions result in those children who most desperately require education being put outside the school gates. In other words, the children who would benefit most from being in the classroom and subject to the authority and discipline that are exercised there are the children who are excluded from those benefits. That cannot be right.

Mr. Dunn: Given the Leader of the Opposition's fixation with opinion polls, and given that 68 per cent. of those polled were in favour of the restoration of corporal punishment, how long will it be before that is the policy of the Labour party?

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. I see the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) nodding his assent. No doubt, that is something that will emerge during the passage of the Education Bill.

It is significant that the past 10 years have seen a steady increase in disciplinary problems because they coincide with the period following the abolition of corporal punishment. Hon. Members expect teachers to work miracles. We take from them one method of maintaining discipline but put nothing in its place and expect matters to continue as before. Recent events have shown just how unwise we are to expect that to happen. I simply seek to give teachers an added sanction: the use of the cane.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): As my hon. Friend knows, I shall support his amendment. He has not mentioned, however, punishing parents whose children misbehave. It is a parental, not a school, problem. Why do we not put parents of unruly kids in prison for six months? If we did that, at least they might make their kids behave in school.

Mr. Pawsey: I am obliged to my hon. Friend for that intervention.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Has the hon. Gentleman looked at the judgments handed down by the European Court of Human Rights, particularly the application in 1982 of Mrs. Grace Campbell and Mrs. Jane Cosans to the European Court on whether they could stipulate as a reason for not allowing a child into a school the fact that they did not accept corporal punishment on the basis of a philosophical conviction?

Mr. Pawsey: The Conservative party does not believe that parent-school contracts should be inflexible, whereas the Labour party believes that everyone should sign up to them.

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): The Labour party believes that they should be compulsory. It is the party of compulsion.

Mr. Pawsey: My right hon. Friend is right; the Labour party would make such contracts enforceable. I believe that they should be voluntary. The difference between the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) and me is that I do not believe in forcing things down parents' or schools' throats. I want to give them maximum possible choice and diversity, so that if a parent does not wish to sign a contract, they are not forced to do so. If a school's governing body does not wish to adopt the clause that I envisage, it will not put it in. I merely seek to add to the teachers' armoury one more sanction that they may use. If they choose not to use it, so be it, but that added sanction would help to ensure greater discipline in the nation's schools.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pawsey: No, I should like to continue my speech.

Corporal punishment would not be used to any marked extent; its existence would be deterrent enough. My amendment would allow schools—I stress the word "allow"—to use corporal punishment. Its use would be a free decision made by individual heads and governing bodies. The amendment would therefore be permissive, not prescriptive, similar to earlier clauses in the Bill on selection. My amendment merely continues—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I am having difficulty in finding the hon. Gentleman's amendment on this evening's Order Paper.

Mr. Pawsey: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am speaking to the part of the Bill that refers to discipline in schools and I seek briefly to advance a case which I have almost concluded. I should like to continue with it if I might.

Mr. Dafis: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pawsey: No, I shall not give way. I have had a broad hint from Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As I was saying, my amendment merely continues in the direction of giving greater powers to parents and schools, which is the laudable objective of the Conservative party and its education policies. In the past few months, we have witnessed greater and growing indiscipline in the nation's schools, culminating in the events at Manton school and the Ridings school.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is concerned about the growing number of teachers who are taking early retirement. People become teachers not because they wish to become rich but because of the vocational aspect of teaching and the satisfaction that many teachers get from their job. There can be little satisfaction or pleasure, however, in seeking to teach an ill-disciplined or disruptive class, which threatens physical violence. No wonder many teachers seek to get out early. The restoration of corporal punishment in schools would signal the fact that society is no longer prepared to tolerate the thuggish activities of a small minority of children and that society is now prepared to take stronger action to defend those who wish to learn and those who seek to teach. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) said, education best takes place in a disciplined environment. My amendment would simply

give teachers an added sanction that they could use. The decision to use it would lie with parents, governors and teachers.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House are convinced about the threat posed by violence and indiscipline in schools. In the past, the Opposition have opposed every reform that we have introduced, but this time, in the interests of the nation's children, I urge them to join us. The hon. Member for Brightside said that we should pull together. I urge the Opposition to pull together with us on this issue. Corporal punishment would be used rarely. Its principal value would lie in deterrence and its mere existence would usually be enough. It would help hard-pressed teachers and reduce the number of exclusions. It would help to restore discipline and authority, and make teaching easier. I support the Bill.

6.17 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): The past half hour in the Chamber has been fascinating. First, we had an excellent speech by the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) and then we had a speech by the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey). He is always a persuasive speaker and several times he had the House spellbound and beginning to support some of his proposals.

The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth talked persuasively about the importance of transparency in our system of education funding, and he noted the fact that I agreed with him. He will be aware that the all-party Education and Employment Select Committee has frequently made a plea for greater transparency. He omitted to remind the House, however, that the Government introduced the funding mechanism which he criticised, and which he supported.

The hon. Gentleman also spoke persuasively about the importance of development plans after Ofsted inspections and said that it was vital that they be taken seriously. I entirely agree with him. I was beginning to be persuaded by his argument that such plans should be debated in the House, until his subsequent remarks reminded me that that would mean that a serious education plan would be debated in the House by hon. Members like the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth who tell the House, and believe it, that class size does not matter. It would worry me enormously that hon. Members discussing a serious education plan held that view despite all the evidence to the contrary. Even the Government proudly boasted in their election manifestos of 1982 and 1987 that they had managed to reduce class sizes. At that time they obviously thought that it was important.

There is a great deal of good in our education service, but I doubt whether anyone on either side of the Chamber would disagree with the view that further improvements are desperately needed if Britain is to succeed in the increasingly global market.

There are three possible ways forward. The first calls for a return to the golden era. I hope that most hon. Members present would agree that there never was a golden era that provided excellence for all. Perhaps there was a golden era that provided excellence for a few, but not for all. The second option, which my party and I would support, would ensure a high-quality education service that was properly resourced and was based on the key principles that underpin the Education Act 1944—partnership and co-operation.

The third way forward, which the Government seem to favour, is epitomised by the Bill and represents the belief that roughly everything is okay in the education service—it just needs a little tweaking here and there, and a further dose of market forces in the form of competition. The problem with that approach is that it fails to reflect what competition means. In a competitive system based on market forces, there are winners, of course, but there are also losers. I want an education service in which there are no losers and everyone is a winner.

I have been in the House for a relatively short time, but I have already got used to the ritual of the annual education Bill, even though the Government told us two years ago that there would be no further education Bills. The one difference between this Bill and those that I have seen through the House is that the present Bill is rather like the curate's egg. Unlike the other Bills, in which almost everything was bad, this Bill is a mixture of good and bad. I am pleased that it contains some helpful elements, which my party and I would be prepared to support.

It is right, for example, that the Bill proposes measures to improve careers support for students and pupils. It is right to amalgamate the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority with the National Council for Vocational Qualifications—I proposed that back in 1992. It is right to define the start of the compulsory school age. It is right that agency teachers should be brought within the current teacher requirements—for example, that they should meet medical fitness requirements and that they could be barred for misconduct.

The Bill contains further measures that might be good, depending on the details, which will no doubt be enunciated in Committee. I support in principle, at least, base line testing, the setting of targets by schools, and the inspection of the work of local education authorities by Ofsted. Those three measures, however, involve the setting of targets, hurdles or standards. Many in the world of education want support to enable them to reach those targets and standards, and to get over those hurdles.

Other measures in the Bill are more controversial. No one who speaks in the debate would oppose the introduction of measures to improve discipline in our schools. Some of the measures proposed may be helpful and may be supported by parents, teachers and governors. The proposal in relation to detention, for example, would ensure that no one treated the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) illegally, and would allow schools to keep pupils back for detention, having notified parents, even if parents did not support the idea. That, I believe, is the right way forward.

Increased flexibility in relation to exclusions would be welcomed by schools. I merely point out that the Secretary of State herself a year ago removed some of the flexibility that existed.

In response to the comments of the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth, I hope that the House will not view the reintroduction of corporal punishment as a helpful means of reducing levels of indiscipline in our schools. I have already stated my fundamental opposition to it. There is no evidence that a return to corporal punishment will help in the battle against indiscipline in our schools. I repeat that, at a time when we are trying to

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reduce levels of violence in our society, I do not understand how we can contemplate a form of punishment that is violent.

Mr. Dafis: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) for allowing me to share some of my experience with him and with the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey). I was a teacher for 32 years. During that time I used what might be called corporal interventions—that is, I did use corporal punishment at times. What I learnt with time was that, whereas that method worked with basically well-adjusted but mischievous and lively pupils, with the alienated it was very damaging. Of course it would be impossible for a teacher to make a decision to use corporal punishment with the decent but mischievous pupil, but not with the seriously alienated pupil. In those circumstances it must not be used at all.

Mr. Foster: I entirely support the hon. Gentleman's view. He, like me, may have been amused by the letter that appeared in *The Guardian* last week, which I share with the House in case other hon. Members did not see it. It was from a gentleman from New York who was visiting London. He wrote:

"As an American I could not comprehend your controversy over corporal punishment—until I visited some of your telephone booths. Mrs. Shephard's proposal to permit caning is clearly part of a plan to expand sex education to your schools."

There is a need to improve discipline in our schools. Some of the measures will be helpful, but corporal punishment certainly will not.

Another problem related to measures dealing with discipline is the proposal for home-school contracts. We would all accept that it is vital for school and home to work together to assist all children's educational development. The question is how best to create the hone-school partnership. The mere signing of a contract will not achieve that. The critical factor is the process of the home and the school working together to reach agreement about rights and responsibilities. I do not understand how a system which proposes that contracts must be signed before the child even enters the school can possibly work. There will have been no time to develop the process of working together. Furthermore, there is a real problem for parents who know that they cannot control their child. Do they sign the contract just to get the child into the school, knowing that they do not mean what they are signing, or do they honestly refuse to sign it, in which case there is no possibility of their child going to the school? That is yet another form of pernicious selection. In the current formulation by both the Government and the Opposition, my party will oppose such moves.

Perhaps the worst elements of the Bill are those to which hon. Members have devoted most of their remarks: the increase in selection and in support for grant-maintained status. I fundamentally oppose both measures. I am particularly worried that the selection proposals will allow some schools to increase selection and change their characters significantly without the need for standard statutory requirements. Various proposals for significant change were advanced under existing statutory requirements, some of which the Secretary of State turned down—presumably she had good reasons for doing so. Yet in this Bill she seeks to remove her own power. Therefore, proposals that she disagreed with in the past may now go ahead to the detriment of other schools in the same area.

I have already said that increased selection reduces choice because it is no longer a case of parents selecting schools but a case of schools selecting pupils. The Secretary of State could not respond to that point. She must be aware that there is no real desire for increased selection in this country. Very few grant-maintained schools that have the power to increase selection exercise that option. Opinion polls—such as the Gallup poll, which was mentioned earlier—show that 77 per cent. of British people are opposed to increased selection in our schools. Increased selection makes a mockery of any attempt at strategic planning in the education service.

The same is true of increasing the number of grant-maintained schools. The latest proposals in the Bill are another attempt to refloat that failed flagship policy. As I pointed out in an earlier debate, the policy is so unpopular that only 0.5 per cent. of eligible schools bothered to conduct a ballot for grant-maintained status in the past 12 months. The Secretary of State is so desperate to increase the number of grant-maintained schools in this country that she has brushed aside criticisms about the latest ballot at the Arthur Mellows village college in the Prime Minister's constituency. The Secretary of State acknowledged that the information provided to parents by governors was misleading, but she refused to declare the ballot void. That shows the extent of the Government's desperation in trying to bolster the number of grant-maintained schools in this country.

The key parts of the Bill will increase the chaos and the division in our education system. There is no doubt that the Bill was drawn up in the last chance saloon. As it is the last chance, one might think that the Government would try hard to pick a winner. Sadly, the Government have failed to do that with this legislation.

6.32 pm

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Listening to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), I was reminded of the political faction that existed in America towards the end of the 19th century. They were called "mug wumps" because they faced two directions at once: they sat on the fence with their mug on one side and their wump on the other. We have seen a good example of that today. If hon. Members do not know what a "wump" is, they should ask Roy Jenkins.

The Liberal Democrat spokesman opposes grammar schools, city technology colleges, the assisted places scheme, private education, the Bill and everything that the Government have done. What does he support? He favours the comprehensivisation of our education system—that is the ineluctable conclusion that we must draw from his heartfelt and sincere contribution. This is a good Bill which contains much that I can support, and I shall help my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) to see it augmented to include corporal punishment.

Let me state the obvious for the first time in my life: the Government do not run a single school in this country. Governments have not done so since the 1890s, the 1930s, the Education Act 1944 and certainly not under the

measures that we have passed over 17 years. Local education authorities run schools but Governments can indirectly influence and shame local education authorities into achieving better performances.

There are black spots in education provision in this country—no hon. Member would deny that. Where are those black spots and what are their historical origins? They occur mainly in inner London and in our major cities such as Liverpool, Manchester and Bradford. Those areas were run by Labour and embraced trendy, philosophical education ideas. Strangely, the Labour party's current policies would affect those people whom it claims to represent: the Labour voters. I shall give reasons for my claims. I have a list of the 10 worst local education authorities in the country. The standard table shows the number of children who obtain five or more passes at GCSE grades A to C. According to that table, Islington has 17.4 per cent.—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."] Knowsley has 19.2 per cent., Tower Hamlets 21.7 per cent.—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."] I am not sure whether Tower Hamlets is still controlled by Labour. According to the table, Southwark has 22.2 per cent., Manchester has 22.5 per cent.—

Hon. Members: Labour.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We do not need sedentary comments as to who controls every borough that the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) mentions in the Chamber.

Mr. Dunn: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was so deafened by my hon. Friends' comments that I could not hear myself speak. Newham has 23.7 per cent., Hackney 23.9 per cent., Liverpool 26.1 per cent. and Sandwell 26.9 per cent. That compares with an English average of 43.5 per cent. It is no wonder that, when faced with the prospect of education provision in Islington, the Leader of the Opposition chose to send his child outside the borough. It is no wonder that the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) sends her child to a school outside her district, or that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) abandoned the schools in Southwark to become a refugee in Conservative-controlled Bromley.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm whether the research that he mentions refers to the socio-economic background of the areas concerned?

Mr. Dunn: I shall come to that point in due course. Islington is a gentrified area—it must be if the hon. Lady lives there.

I think that all hon. Members would agree that the Ridings school in Calderdale suffered from over-exposure in the media: there was too much media involvement. Equally, many of my constituents are incredulous that one 10-year-old boy can close a school in Worksop. That school also suffered as a result of media exposure. Successful schools are succeeding because of the channelling and adapting of parental pressure that is applied to schools and local authorities and the freedom afforded by grant-maintained status.

I am of an age to remember when comprehensivisation was the fashion.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: It still is.

Mr. Dunn: I agree with my hon. Friend. Comprehensivisation meant that children attended the comprehensive school situated in their local area. A line was drawn around the school, it had a catchment area and pupils had no choice but to attend that comprehensive school. If families lived in an area that was affluent, middle class and supportive, academic results were often quite good. However, if families lived at the wrong end of town where parents were not so supportive or there were problems attaining a working school-parent relationship—to which the hon. Member for Bath referred—results were often poor. Such schools usually became sink schools. I know that because I was an 11-plus failure and come from a blue-collar worker family in industrial Lancashire. No one need lecture me about the problems associated with deprivation or about the aspirations of working-class folk. Working-class folk in so many parts of the country, represented by Labour Members, have been abandoned, neglected and denied the opportunity that bright working-class children should have.

There is nothing more pernicious than the choice of school for a family being dependent on whether the father rents from the local authority or can afford to buy a house in the catchment area of the more fashionable and more successful school down the road.

Arguments about money are significant. We always hear Labour Members talking about money. The important issue is not the amount of money that is available but the way in which it is spent. If maximum expenditure were the key to success, why was not the Inner London education authority a great success? It was top in terms of expenditure and bottom when it came to results. That example defeats for all time the argument that money is the key to success.

There is, of course, more than that to education. There is the parent relationship, which was referred to by the hon. Member for Bath. There is the chemistry that is created by the head. There is the good and supportive governing body. There is also the commitment of parents, or parent when there is only one in the family. These are all important ingredients.

We must not make deprivation the excuse. I learnt as a Minister at the Department of Education and Science that every Member should have tattooed on his or her forehead the following: "The key to a child's success at school is the socio-economic background from which that child comes." Labour Members tried with their friends in local education authorities socially to engineer and to bus pupils. Labour was unfocused or wrongly focused and thus was missing the problem.

The real problem was that expectation was not high enough for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Excuses were made too often by indifferent teachers, who were more concerned about the politics of education than about education itself. For all time we must defend the right of ordinary parents to have preference for the education that they want for their children. If a form of education is good enough for the Leader of the Opposition, it is good enough for the people whom I represent.

A while back, Labour Members were talking about a quota system at university level to work against children who had attended public schools. How long will it be before they have a quota for those children who come from grammar schools, grant-maintained schools, Church

[Mr. Dunn]

schools or single-sex schools? Once there is a quota for one section of the child population, the system will spread like a cancer throughout the entire system.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth talked ably about policies to be created by schools to ensure discipline. When the time comes in later debates, I shall be taking up my hon. Friend's remarks. This evening, however, I wish to read a passage that appears in a book published by my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson), a long-standing friend. His book is entitled "Boyson on education". It is available at £12.95. It has been published by Peter Owen publishers.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North is a distinguished educationist. He served in the second world war, after which he was a teacher and a head teacher. He was a distinguished naval man and godfather to my son. If he wrote a book on cooking, he would out-Delia Delia. A passage on page 67 reads:

"I still think that overall the withdrawal of corporal punishment in 1984 has made the task of teachers, particularly amongst boys in secondary schools, more difficult. Corporal punishment certainly does not solve all problems, but the knowledge that it exists in the school and is used where necessary was certainly a constraint on pupil misbehaviour."

That must be the yardstick.

Mr. Rowe *rose—*

Mr. Dunn: I shall, of course, give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Rowe: I am not certain that I heard my hon. Friend correctly. Did he say that the book of my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) was being flogged for £12.99?

Mr. Dunn: No, £12.95. I am sure that it can be obtained at a discount.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth, I believe that corporal punishment should be available to school governing bodies. I believe also that parents should vote at annual meetings to decide whether governors should be required to adopt or adapt a policy of corporal punishment. Such a policy should be available only when it is the view of the head that a child or children should be so chastised.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North made a good point the other day when he said that no child should be administered punishment of the cane in the cold light of another day. In other words, the punishment must take place there and then, and the child must understand why the punishment is taking place. The alternative is exclusions.

I come from industrial Lancashire, and I can tell the House that no child was excluded in my day. Parents made sure that their children turned up for school. Society was much more disciplined. We accept that it is less disciplined these days. All that we do now is exclude the child. As the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) said, the excluded child is given two hours of teaching a week, or four or six. That is not enough. Excluded children are abandoned and they go on to the streets of our cities or in other communities. They are subject to the preying instinct of those who do not have their interests at heart. More importantly, they join other youngsters and form gangs. They engage in anti-social, anti-establishment and anti-school behaviour. That becomes the norm. That cannot be right.

Against that background, I hope that the Bill can be amended—

Mr. Kilfoyle: The hon. Gentleman has quoted my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor), but he has done so selectively. What about the case of Rikki Neave, who knew nothing but brutality in his short life? If he had not died in such a dreadful way, he would undoubtedly have been one of the recipients of the sort of punishment that the hon. Gentleman is advocating. That child would have known only violence. Is it any surprise that such children end up as violent parents?

Mr. Dunn: I do not deny that children who are abused become abusers. I am merely saying that those of us who support the view—

Ms Hodge: Why cane them?

Mr. Dunn: If the hon. Lady will contain herself, I shall tell her.

Those of my hon. Friends who share my view say that corporal punishment—the cane—should be available to the head. It is for the head to make a judgment in the context of the case that is before him. Let the punishment fit the crime, as the Gilbert and Sullivan refrain goes.

I move on to clauses 3 to 5, which deal with the extension of grant-maintained powers. There is no doubt that grant-maintained schools and the policy behind them have been an outstanding success. I know that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) has visited my constituency from time to time to see the marvellous work that is being done in the area. We have nine grant-maintained schools, four grammar schools, some excellent high schools, a city technology college and an excellent 11-to-18 years of age comprehensive school. Dartford probably has a range, variety and choice of schools that is second to none throughout the country.

Under the Labour party's policies, that range, variety and choice would go. The Labour party says that we cannot have selection by interview or examination, but if schools cease to adopt that approach, they will become comprehensive. The Labour party has said that it will close the city technology college. We are told that grant-maintained status would be abolished. Accordingly, schools would revert to local education authority control. The prospect for my constituents is the onslaught of the comprehensive system, which we have fought against for so many years.

There is a particular feature of the grant-maintained system that I find especially attractive. I am surprised that Labour democrats do not. It is that parents vote for or against the grant-maintained system. There are examples where the vote has gone against even when it might have been in the interests of the schools involved to become grant-maintained. Whatever the outcome, where parents have voted we have seen a new dynamism established.

There is no doubt that in Kent the local education authority has had to work extremely hard to put itself in some sort of shape following the opting out of so many

Kent schools, even though it is massively over-staffed, over-bureaucratised and over-politicised. We know that things will change in May next year when the Conservative party retakes control of the county council.

If, however, the policies of Labour Members were enacted, no parent would have the right, opportunity or freedom to exercise choice, unless they were very wealthy. The majority would be stuck with the comprehensive neighbourhood scheme, which we in Kent have fought against throughout our lives.

We heard from the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) that he supported some aspects of the Bill, which he welcomed, as did the hon. Member for Bath. I have been in the House a long time—since 1979, but not long enough—and I remember that Labour voted against the Education Act 1979, the Education Act 1980, the Education Reform Act 1988—a massive measure, excellently taken through the House by me and others—the Education (Student Loans) Act 1990, the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, the Education Act 1993, the Education Act 1994, the Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Act 1986, and so on. Labour MPs are consistent in advancing a cosmetic theory in public: "Yes, we stand for parental rights and freedom of choice," but in truth when the issue comes along they are prepared to vote it down time and again.

In conclusion—I am reluctant to finish, because I am enjoying this—Labour would abolish grant-maintained schools, the assisted places scheme and city technology colleges and would draw back at least 10 per cent. from the budgets of existing grant-maintained schools by returning them to LEA control after abolishing the Funding Agency for Schools for England. Opposition Members should take a long, hard look at themselves. I dislike the word hypocrisy enormously, but what is more, I dislike it being practised in the name of the people.

6.50 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Before I read the Education Bill, I was under the distinct impression that dinosaurs were extinct. I feel very much the same as my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor), in that I never thought, when I entered the House of Commons, that I would ever be faced with a renewal of the argument over selection.

Frankly, selection is not efficient for children's education, and if the Prime Minister thinks for one moment that it will be popular, he is sadly mistaken. It will be grossly unpopular, unless, of course—and this is always a possibility—grammar schools, as was the case when we had the 11-plus examination, contain fee-paying classes. Ten years ago, it might have been astonishing to think that anybody would suggest bringing back selection. If, by some misfortune, the Government were to be in power for another Parliament, I should not be surprised to see the reintroduction of prep school class forms 1 and 2, with fee payers entering the school. After all, through the ages, many Conservative Members have sent their sons and daughters to comprehensive schools. Many children of Conservative Members, past and present, were sent to comprehensive schools such as Eton and Harrow. So there is always a way out for them if their children do not pass the 11-plus examination.

I have my own experience of the 11-plus examination. Unlike the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), I passed the 11-plus. He failed—and it shows—but I was successful at a time when the only way of getting a better education in the city of Liverpool was by passing the 11-plus examination. I went to Alsop high school, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle). I commend the education that I received there. It was excellent in every way, and I think that the House will agree that it shows.

That opportunity should have been open to all. Conservative Members fail to understand that children's educational development operates at different rates. Although a child's aptitude can be determined at the age of 11, his or her ability cannot be determined, bearing in mind the fact that, in two or three years' time, he or she might be assigned to what were secondary modern schools. If the Government's intentions to create more grammar schools are fulfilled, more and more of our children with no choice will be assigned to the equivalent of the old secondary modern schools.

What does selection mean in practice? It does not mean a society that is at ease with itself. It creates division among neighbours. I can remember when I passed the 11-plus, and children who had gone through primary classes together were divided. The point has already been made about the division that the 11-plus created within families, but it is worth repeating. Imagine it if one youngster in a family was successful in passing the 11-plus and then went to the grammar school, but a couple of years later the second child took the examination and failed. Many of our children were told at the age of 11 that they had no real ability.

The Conservative Government are keen on league tables. Frankly, if there were a league table for the Conservative Government's performance, they would just about be relegated to the Vauxhall Conference. But, of course, league tables will encourage something that already existed at the time of the 11-plus examination. Division took place not at 11-plus, but at seven-plus. When youngsters went from the infants' classes into the junior school, they were quickly segregated into an A and a B class. I was fortunate, as I went into an A class, so every Friday morning we would have tests that were based on the previous junior scholarship examination. That happened year after year from the age of seven.

The absurd suggestion has been made that there should be formal segregation at the primary stage. That will come in any case if the intentions in the Bill are realised. There is no plan for the number of grammar schools. All we are told by the Secretary of State is that any school can decide, although it was rather noticeable that when I questioned her and asked whether that meant that parents would be balloted, she did not answer. She merely said that each school would determine. How many grammar schools will there be in London; how many in Liverpool—fortunately for our Scottish friends, Glasgow is exempt from this—how many in Manchester; how many in Canterbury; how many in Oxford and so on? In the past, the proportion of children who gained a grammar school place differed from one part of the country to another. In Wales in the 1940s and early 1950s, 66 per cent. of children went to grammar schools.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): That is how I got into grammar school.

Mr. Wareing: I am glad that my hon. Friend was successful. I am sure that even if he had lived in Liverpool, where the proportion was only 7 per cent., he would still have qualified, because his intelligence shows.

[Mr. Wareing]

Segregation will also apply to teaching staff. Teachers will want to teach in grammar schools, where the children's motivation is likely to be better than that of children at secondary modern schools, many of whom will feel that they have been discarded at a young age.

There are alternatives. Conservative Members sometimes argue that it is necessary to push the brightest children. That can be and is being done in the comprehensive system. There are arguments against streaming, but nevertheless streaming occurs. There are sets in the comprehensive system. Indeed, at Alsop high school in Liverpool, which I attended, we had sets. A person could be in a lower set for chemistry and physics, and in a higher one for French and Spanish. The important thing was that the children were part of one community. We must not have elitism in our education system.

It is important to remember that educational achievement should not be interpreted only in terms of examination success. We should have regard to the success of teachers in teaching our children to see themselves as part of a wider community. Life in the community matters, and it is right for the son or daughter of a doctor to be educated in the same establishment as the son or daughter of a dock worker. That is what I mean by education for life in the community.

I spent a quarter of a century in further education. The intake was mainly young people of school-leaving age and older, many of whom had been through the secondary modern system. They attained many A-levels and went on to universities and training colleges. That proves that children and young people—perhaps all of us—develop at different rates. To segregate at 11 would be disastrous for the overwhelming majority of children. It is an ideology of elitism. All I can say to the Prime Minister is, "So much for the classless society."

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members that until 9 pm speeches are restricted to 10 minutes.

7.4 pm

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North–East): I was pleased to listen to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), because in 1993 I served with him on the Committee considering the Education Bill. He referred to the provisions of that Bill as being in chaos and confusion. I am pleased that he has graduated from that, and is now referring to chaos and division. Perhaps he has changed his views on education since then and is now more enlightened.

The Bill is about raising standards. This country must have a well-educated work force if it is to compete in the global economy, about which we heard so much when the Foreign Secretary introduced his White Paper earlier. The education system must ensure that all youngsters reach their full potential, and that when they leave school, they are able to do not only what one expects an education system to enable them to do—read, write and add up—but more than that. It is crucial that they are able to communicate with other people and use information technology so that they are employable. It is a tragedy that too many children leave school and are not employable, because they have not developed those skills. That may be because of their lack of motivation at school after they have become disaffected, bad teaching and the fact that the curriculum is not relevant to their needs.

Much has been done to raise education standards, and I am delighted that the record of improvement at GCSE and A-level has been sustained. The number of children with five or more A to C grades has increased from 24 per cent. in 1979 to 43 per cent. in 1995, and the number with two or more A-levels is up from 14 per cent. in 1979 to 29 per cent. That is a great achievement, but there is more to be done.

That improvement has been achieved by the introduction of an element of competition into the education system through the publication of examination results. That was shunned by Opposition Members—we heard that view again just now. When he was Prime Minister, Lord Callaghan said that it was about time that we opened up the forbidden garden of education. What a fight that has been. It has been a fight over the dead bodies of Labour-controlled local education authorities up and down the country in the 1980s. They did everything possible to thwart the publication of results.

I regret to say that even today attempts are made deliberately to ensure that people are not provided with information about what goes on in the schools in their area. I read with great interest the recent article in *The Daily Telegraph* by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). All he was trying to do was to find out what was going on in the schools of Berkshire. Only a limited number of schools responded positively: most of them resisted.

I welcome the proposals in the White Paper on base line testing. That is important, but I ask my hon. Friend the Minister of State to resist the siren voices of Opposition Members who say that the results of examinations and tests should be massaged by taking account of socio-economic factors. By all means publish those results alongside the basic figures, but I urge my hon. Friend to ensure that we publish the base figures for all the test results this summer of children aged 11 on a school-by-school basis, and that we resist attempts by the unions and head teachers to prevent their publication.

I also welcome the proposals in the Bill on inspections. I pay tribute to Chris Woodhead, the chief inspector, for what he has done to reform the inspectorate. He has had the courage to speak out about standards, and to take on the education establishment. I urge the Secretary of State to ensure that he gets full backing. I would like to see the Leader of the Opposition give a commitment to ensure that the chief inspector stays in post, and is not replaced by a weak-livered liberal who will do the education establishment's bidding.

The chief inspector is right to insist that primary schools concentrate on phonics to ensure that children are able to read. We must be careful to ensure that the inspectorate guarantees the delivery of good-quality education. Too often in the past, inspectors have undermined good-quality education.

A key part of the Bill deals with choice and diversity. I have always supported the case for a full range of schools, from comprehensives to grammar schools. In Croydon, I supported the establishment of a city technology college at the Harris school in Upper Norwood. It was interesting to note the way in which

Labour Members serving on the Standing Committee considering the Bill that became the Education Act 1996 were prepared to finger that school and say that it was not achieving good examination results. I have not heard them praise it now that it is producing nearly 57 per cent. of youngsters with five GCSE passes graded A to C, but that is a tribute to the changes that have been brought about there.

Before it became a CTC, the school could attract only just over 40 first-choice applications from Croydon parents. It is now massively oversubscribed. Moreover, it selects not on the basis of ability, but across the ability range, and has a dyslexia unit. It deserves much praise for having introduced diversity.

I also welcome the proposals to allow schools to select more pupils on the basis of ability or aptitude. I do not believe that that constitutes the reintroduction of the 11-plus through the back door. Indeed, I would not support the reintroduction of the 11-plus, for a variety of reasons. It was too rigid. *[Interruption.]* It does not constitute the reintroduction of the 11-plus through the back door, in any shape or form—or through the front door. What it does is give schools the opportunity to decide whether they wish to select on the basis of ability or aptitude—and parents will have a choice. As was said just now, one of the problems is that under the current system, choice depends crucially on where people live.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) mentioned Edenham school, in my constituency. It is a fact that, under the current arrangements, there are two very good grant-maintained schools in Shirley. They are massively oversubscribed—and good luck to them: they do a first-class job. Because they are so oversubscribed, however, parents in south Norwood and Woodside do not get a look in. Their choice is diminished. My reason for welcoming the decision of both those schools to select 15 per cent. of pupils on the basis of ability or aptitude is that it gives children in south Norwood and Woodside the chance of a place.

When Opposition Members talk about selection, we never hear about the damage that was wrought in inner London by the destruction of the grammar schools. I had the opportunity to go to a London county council primary school in what would be regarded today as a very deprived part of inner London. I went to Bellenden junior mixed infants school—which, I regret to say, is no longer a school. It is instructive to note that at that time there were four forms of entry, with 40 pupils in each class. There were no complaints then about the pupil-teacher ratio; no so-called alibis for failure there. A total of 160 children were admitted, and that school managed to get one whole form of entry—40 pupils—to grammar school. I happened to be one of the lucky ones: I managed to pass.

Why was that school able to achieve such success in those days? Because it ran a tough education system. It was determined to achieve high education standards, and it used discipline. What happens in such areas now does not compare with that. The Labour party has much to answer for, given the destruction of the inner London education system for which it was responsible. It has caused more social divisiveness in London, by forcing many parents to move into outer London.

Whether my hon. Friends want to consider corporal punishment is a separate issue, but I believe that we should look into the discipline that is available to staff in primary schools in particular. What does a teacher do when a seven-year-old is screaming his or her head off and throwing chairs around, and the teacher is not even allowed to smack that child? The House will have to return to that issue. Unless it does—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I call the next speaker.

7.13 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The speech of the hon. Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) lacked logic. He cannot be in favour of both selection and comprehensive education; that would not be educationally digestible. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the publication of results. I am in favour of an open education system, but my last two visits to education establishments in my constituency made me very angry about one aspect of the point that he made.

I visited Swinton special school for children with severe learning difficulties—a wonderful school, which I believe was mentioned in *The Times Educational Supplement*. It is a very happy school, with a splendid staff—a caring school—and the children do achieve, but they are of limited intellectual ability. In an earlier intervention, I said that it was too easy to label children. I find it rather sad that that school's results are published each year, and that each year it has no GCSE successes. The children would not be there if they were going to succeed at GCSE, so why on earth publish results for schools of that kind? It can have only a negative effect.

The other establishment that I visited was the Red Barn project, operated by the local authority and Barnardos. It deals with teenagers who have been expelled from school. The only reason that I mention that splendid project is that it demonstrates the cost of the Government's failure. While concentrating on children who may come from a middle-class background and an affluent area, who have job prospects and excellent environmental opportunities, and who can succeed, we forget the label that the Government place on the 50 per cent. who do not fall into that class. We tell them that they are stupid and unemployable. The hon. Member for Croydon, North-East referred to that. We tell them that they are members of an underclass. We are creating enormous problems by not providing adequate opportunities for our young people.

I was a schoolmaster for a long time. I started teaching at a secondary modern. There were 49 pupils in my first class. The hon. Member for Croydon, North-East said that people did not worry about classes of 40, but he probably did not realise that a good deal was being said by those teaching such classes. When I had been at the school for only about a year, I was the third most senior member of staff. In those days, it was possible to get rapid promotion.

For two years, I taught at a primary school to gain experience. I spent one of those years with a class of 40 but no classroom: we had more classes than rooms. When the weather was fine, that was all right, because I could go out into the sunshine, but when it rained the children were either in the school hall or the boys' cloakroom, seated under wet mackintoshes. I learnt a great deal about how to maintain order in school.

I find it repulsive that the reaction of Conservative Members—or a certain proportion of them—is to flog children. That is the same sort of reaction that we see from the authorities in Brazil, where the police

[Mr. Peter Hardy]

exterminate poor children in the cities. This is a foolish approach. It is not the answer. The child who screamed—the child mentioned by the hon. Member for Croydon, North-East—had probably been struck many times, perhaps at home.

I will not identify any child—although you know what I am talking about, Mr. Deputy Speaker—but I have had a great deal of experience with a number of difficult children. One, whom I know very well, was tortured and abused in the most foul way. I believe that that is one reason why the Government allow video evidence in court. The abuse of that child was described as a monstrous event but, because of the care that he received, despite all his likely prospects, at the age of 20 he has now entered management and probably has many years of success in front of him. That boy would have been ruined if he had received further maltreatment. Much more sympathetic treatment is needed than some perverse Conservative Members would suggest.

In the early 1960s, after I was convinced of the case for comprehensive education, I fought for a change at a fine school in my area—a school that I attended, and beside which I still live. I refer to Wath upon Dearne grammar school. I led the fight for it to become a comprehensive. There was a terrific battle in the community. The headmaster, for whom I had enormous respect, was uneasy. I suggested that we should keep the 11-plus for a time and for some years we made special arrangements for that examination.

In 1971, in my first year in the House, the headmaster invited me to be the guest speaker on speech day. I wondered what he would say, because he could be sardonic and I thought that he might repay me for the battle that we had won to make that school a comprehensive. The audience knew about the battle and that we had forced the measure through. I was delighted when he said that he had not been enthusiastic but that, as a result of the decision, 92 young people who had failed the 11-plus had entered or were entering higher education. I felt vindicated.

If the Secretary of State for Wales sat the 11-plus at that time, he probably passed it. I noticed that he did not listen to the nonsense spoken by Conservative Members. The school that I am speaking about is his old school. It is a fine comprehensive. There is, however, great anxiety there because the provision for local government education is grossly inadequate. The Government have been consistent in providing ever more resources for the minority and ever fewer for the majority.

In areas such as mine, in inner cities and in the industrial parts of England, children see no opportunities, and local authorities are starved of the resources that could provide for our youth services, which are working on a shoestring. The provision of challenges and motivation is being grossly ignored. I fear that the local government financial settlement next year will apply so much pressure that local authorities will start to sell school playing fields and distribute the resources to avoid adding burdens.

The Government should think again about discipline, which is related to the response of children and their families. We ought to give more priority to teachers who can actively and positively relate to parents, especially those whose children are not co-operating. The Government have created sink schools and the Bill will make them sink further. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members who cannot accept that should look at the structure of education in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon). It is divisive to select a huge proportion of children from bright homes in the more affluent parts of the town and leave the rest from the poor estates to work together with a staff who have perhaps not been consulted, inspired or encouraged and who see greater resources going to the wealthier people in the grant-maintained sector.

This is a fairly small island, and for more than 17 years the Government have foolishly pursued the policy of division at every opportunity. They are continuing that in the Bill, and Britain has already paid a high price for their divisive policy. One can only hope that it will not be pursued because a Government will be elected who will inject common sense into the approach to education instead of inflicting the burdens of bureaucracy and extremism.

I worked with some gifted teachers who secured better results in some subjects at O-level in a secondary modern school with 37 per cent. selection than did those whose pupils were selected. Anyone who talks to those people—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

7.23 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Kent has had selective schools for decades and I can tell the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) that we have neither riotous behaviour nor sink schools. In addition, under the law, more money per child cannot be put into a grammar school than into any other. It is the quality of schooling that counts.

The Bill is about diversity, and in north-west Kent we know all about that. We have grammar, Church and high schools—both mixed and single sex—and a city technology college and children on the assisted places scheme. In my constituency, seven of the eight secondary schools are grant-maintained by the specific choice of the parents, and three primary schools have also become grant-maintained. Considerable damage would be caused if a Labour Government were returned next year.

We heard the hostility of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) to grammar schools. For his information, let me tell him that 25 per cent. of the youngsters in my constituency go on to grammar school and the other 75 per cent. go to good schools, not to sink schools. When the Labour-Liberal coalition took over Kent county council, its hostility to grammar schools, which was reflected in the speeches by the Labour and Liberal Democrat spokesmen in the debate, would have led it to close those schools, but it could not. The support of the parents was such that the two grammar schools in my constituency went grant-maintained. Under a Labour Government, those schools would be vulnerable and subject to the Opposition's tendency to abolish them.

I am also concerned about the threat that a Labour Government would pose to our secondary Church schools, which are also popular because parents expect certain standards from them. Labour is already undermining those schools because the policies of the Liberal-Labour county

council are curtailing the availability of school transport. That is best exemplified in the pernicious policy that is being exercised in the establishment of a new secondary school at Swanscombe. Many children at Church schools would lose their free bus passes. A Labour Government would close our city technology colleges and our assisted places scheme, under which many youngsters go to the excellent Cobham Hall school. By their abolition of grant-maintained schools, a Labour Government would claw back 10 per cent. of school funding in my constituency and would impose hostile political governors. The choice in education in my constituency is clear. It would be damaged by a Labour Government.

The Bill contains a proposal to monitor local education authorities. I should welcome a searching inspection of Kent local education authority. Over the past few years, the further education colleges have gone and 50 per cent. of Kent's secondary schools have become grant-maintained. The careers service in Kent county council has been closed, but administration in the local education authority has not reduced proportionately. There has been a sudden flurry of conferences and propaganda and other activities that result in considerable expense to the authority and waste an immense amount of time of its officers.

We all know about Parkinson's law filling the time that is available. As I said earlier, Kent county council is controlled by a Labour-Liberal coalition. One can believe either that the council has been led by the nose by officers who want to retain their jobs or that it is guilty of straight, crass incompetence. I should welcome an inspection if it led to a shrinkage of the bureaucracy at county hall and at Springfield. If the money thus saved were released, it could go to the sharp end in the schools and that would be a vast improvement.

What does that vast education bureaucracy provide? I shall relate an anecdote about what happened when St. George's Church of England comprehensive school in my constituency proposed to go grant-maintained. I rhetorically asked Rev. Joe King, the chairman of the governors, how he would manage without the expertise and specialist support of the local education authority. I would have expected him to value LEA support. After all, he is a Labour supporter and endorsed my Labour opponent at the last general election. However, that reverend gentleman scoffed. He said, "We can make much better use of the education funds." He led parents to vote for grant-maintained status and the school has gone from strength to strength.

I support in particular the clauses relating to school discipline. We expect teachers to maintain discipline in our schools, yet one of the most deplorable trends since the 1960s has been the decline in teachers' authority. We have progressively stripped them of sanctions and put in doubt the back-up that they should be able to expect from the authorities.

It is not surprising that a vast number of teachers have joined trade unions in search of protection in case they are taken to court or are subject to disciplinary procedures arising from complaints by children or parents. That joining of trade unions does not exactly enhance their professional status.

All that has gone hand in glove with the growth of rights, but the withering of duties, particularly the duty of children, and indeed of parents, to obey authority when they are in school premises. That is why I welcome the Bill's specific provisions for home-school agreements, their scope for enforcing the framework of discipline, the extension of detention powers and the extension of terms of exclusion from a maximum of 15 days to 45 days in any term.

An important provision is strengthening schools' right to be represented on appeal committees and for those committees to have regard for the interests of other pupils and of the staff at schools. In a school, nothing corrodes authority more than if a head teacher is overruled and the child returns to the school, where he metaphorically or even actually thumbs his nose at the head teacher. That child learns the wrong lessons.

I support the proposals to set up management committees to oversee the running of pupil referral units. It is vital that the units should properly educate and civilise excluded pupils. We need their time to be filled effectively and rigorously. My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) has pointed out what happens when children are excluded and not properly supervised. They run riot and develop into gangs, with all the problems that that causes. I welcome in particular the opportunities that have been trailered for an amendment from my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey).

I remember serving on an education committee in 1982, when corporal punishment in schools was abolished. I asked the proponents of its abolition to define an alternative sanction that would be just as effective and that would be introduced. They failed to do so and I voted against the abolition. Significantly, however, I had the verbal support of representatives of various teachers' and head teachers' unions. They supported my argument, but trotted off and voted for the Labour party proposals. The teachers in our schools are lumbered with the consequences and we are reaping a bitter harvest.

Corporal punishment should be a sanction in a head teacher's armoury because it is a deterrent to most children and it provides swift and painful justice, if the head teacher considers that that penalty would be effective. Many people argue that the restoration would contravene the European Court of Human Rights ruling in the 1982 Campbell and Cosans case. That ruling gives parents a right to insist that corporal punishment should not be inflicted on their children at school. The home-school agreements give a magnificent opportunity to include specific parental acceptance of corporal punishment. That should meet the requirements of the European convention on human rights. If it does not, we should withdraw from that convention. In the Adjournment debate on 6 March, I gave chapter and verse on why we could and should withdraw from it.

I support the Bill for all it does to extend choice and diversity for parents, to raise standards and to improve discipline.

7.33 pm

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): I had expected the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to have a little list of Labour Members that she would proceed to read to us and to be on that little list. On both counts, I was not disappointed. We had not

[Dr. Tony Wright]

only the first but the second reading of the list and I predict that, at the close of play today, we shall have the third reading.

The Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): No we shall not.

Dr. Wright: We shall have to wait and see.

I should like to talk less as a politician and slightly more as a parent, whose voice perhaps has not been heard much in the debate. If I may put it like this without being misunderstood, I should like to talk as a promiscuous parent—that is, a parent who has been through a variety of schools. A quick list would reveal voluntary aided schools, county schools, local education authority schools, grant-maintained schools, selective and non-selective schools, single-sex schools, co-education schools, schools that have balloted to stay within the LEA and schools that have balloted to leave it—and we probably have not finished yet.

I suspect that, in doing that, I simply reflect the experiences of a good number of parents in Britain who, unfortunately—or fortunately—do not live their lives according to the ideological exchanges that are visible and that are heard in debates such as this. They do it instead in terms of their children's interests and in the circumstances in which they happen to find themselves, which often are not chosen. I take it that that is what any responsible parent would and should do. The job of Government, both nationally and locally, is to ensure that the choices for parents are real and available.

As my experience has been raised twice by the Secretary of State, may I tell hon. Members a little more about it? It may help the debate. My wife and I chose to live in the city of Birmingham because of work. We did not have any children and did not worry about schools. We then discovered that the city had a system of grammar schools that took about 10 per cent. of the children.

In the city, the dinner table conversation among parents who worry about these things centred around what they would do when their children reached the age of 11. Many parents hoped that they would no longer be in the city at that time. They did not want to face a choice that they thought their generation had banished for good.

Ironically, some people moved to neighbouring authorities. Solihull, I remember, was a favourite because it had a developed a successful comprehensive school system. It happened also to be a solid Conservative borough in those days. What was interesting about Solihull was that, when some years ago the Conservative local authority had the idea of reintroducing selection and starting up grammar schools again, the people of Solihull rose up as a man and a woman and said, "Over our dead bodies you will do that because we have a successful comprehensive system here, to which all our children have access. We do not want any system that would deprive our children of such a system."

Consider what the choice was and what the choice was not. Not only I, but many other people were faced with that position. The choice that I really wanted was of a quality comprehensive system. That was the one choice that was not available. I had a choice between a system that creamed off 10 per cent. of children and a residual system, with poor results and poor performance.

We had to ask ourselves only two questions. Would those grammar schools have a helpful or unhelpful effect on other schools in the authority? We had to consider the performance of those schools to find the answer, which was clear. A second useful question was: if I were a teacher, would I want to teach in a system that had removed the top 10 per cent. of the ability range from my classes? I would not. That told us something about the system. The choice that parents had was whether to remove their children from those little tables at which they sat in primary school with their friends, working in appropriate work groups and send them to this or that school. Should they go to the selective schools—not chosen, but enforced—or to other schools? We did not have the choice to continue the good-quality comprehensive primary schooling at secondary level.

It is odd that we have a system that works well at the primary level, through mixed-ability comprehensive schooling, but that that system then apparently poses a problem at the secondary level. If we can provide successful, differentiated education at the primary level, why cannot we do so at the secondary level? Why do we suddenly move from an orthodoxy at the primary level to regarding that as a problem at the secondary level? We get ourselves into all sorts of difficulties in talking about those matters.

Of course, selection is endemic in any school system. We select schools when we visit them, evaluate them and choose them. We select schools when we choose the areas in which we want to live. We select children—the curriculum word is "differentiation"—when we teach different children differently. That is appropriate selection.

I am fairly obsessive about education—not simply as a parent, but as someone who has been involved in education for many years. I want everybody to be obsessive about education. I am obsessive about it not just for my own children, but for everyone else's children. That is the real test of public policy. I am not impressed by league tables that show me that the schools that two of my children attended are at the top of the league tables, any more than I would be impressed by a system that allowed general practitioners to choose only healthy patients and then to produce tables showing which GPs had the healthiest patients. It would be absurd and would be seen to be absurd, yet we refuse to acknowledge the absurdity when it comes to schools.

The tragedy is that we have known for years and years—indeed, it is simple common sense—what makes effective schools. We know what sort of organisation produces them; we know the role of head teachers, of expectations and of resources. We know all the things that make effective schools. Surely, therefore, the public policy conclusion must be to ensure that everybody has the choice of an effective school in his area. We should not provide more exit routes for people to get out of one school and into another. That is ruinous for children and for society.

What I want for me and for others is a choice of good-quality schools that have all the ingredients going for them. I want the sort of school that Chris Woodhead, for whom I have a good deal of respect, visited in my constituency last week—Redhill primary school. It serves one of the most difficult areas in my constituency, which includes a deprived, demoralised estate with vast numbers of unemployed people and broken families. It is the sort

of school that should pose problems, but I wanted Mr. Woodhead to go there because it is actually one of the most outstandingly successful schools that I have visited. He wrote to me and the school after his visit saying:

"I've rarely enjoyed a school visit more. The energy and enthusiasm of the staff coupled with the positive attitudes displayed by the children impressed me enormously. It showed me, once again, what can be achieved through strong leadership. I'm sure you'll go from strength to strength".

If that can be done in that school, in principle it can be done in every school in the land—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

7.44 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid–Kent): The problem with a debate such as this is that most of the argument consists of saying, "This happened after this and therefore must be caused by this." It is the good old post hoc, ergo propter hoc argument. In fact, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said that the reason why one in three pupils now go on to higher education is that 90 per cent. of schools are comprehensive and therefore it is all entirely thanks to the Labour party. The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. If he is so proud of the fact that 90 per cent. of schools are comprehensive as a direct consequence of the Labour party and if he is so worried about the way that the education system is going, it is not unreasonable for Conservative Members to continue to point out that the schools are substantially run by that self-same Labour party with its Liberal allies. If the system is failing so many children, it is perfectly reasonable to claim that the Labour party is responsible for that—just as it is trying to claim that it is responsible for one in three pupils going on to higher education.

Like other hon. Members, I want to spend a little time talking about discipline. We should spend rather more time supporting the teaching profession rather than attacking it. Most teachers have a fairly rough time. It is difficult to teach in any circumstances, but it is much harder to teach when we have, for various reasons, adopted a policy that as many children as possible should be included in as many as possible classes in mainstream education. It means that a great deal of the time of teachers is disproportionately spent containing children who, for whatever reason, find it difficult to fit into conventional education.

We do not do nearly enough to facilitate peer support for teachers. Teachers who have a problem should not feel ashamed to talk to their colleagues in other local schools, who have had a similar problem, about how to resolve it. We should do a great deal more to facilitate that as it would be very helpful.

I have said for many years that, as we all know, the key figure in developing education in a school is the head teacher. We should take a leaf out of the armed services' book and identify people who are likely to become head teachers and give them the experience of some form of staff college, where they could meet others, learn strategies and learn how to cope. I have tried hard to develop that plan and came very close to doing so with a private benefactor, but sadly he withdrew at the last moment.

It is not attacking teachers to say that we must continue to make it easier quickly to get rid of teachers who, for whatever reason, do not measure up to the job. There is far too much defence of inadequate teachers. Teachers who are finding it difficult to teach should, instead of going through some long union-backed controversy over whether they should have early retirement, be given the much easier option of going out of teaching for a while and then coming back or being retrained in some way without any stigma being associated with that. There are many reasons why, at certain times, teachers feel that teaching in a class is too much for them.

This House should do rather less of trying to teach teachers how to teach. Now that we have in place a measure of whether schools are delivering, we should spend less time wondering how teachers deliver. If they are delivering good results, I do not care whether some of them are doing so by chalk and talk, some by project work and some by team work; I am concerned about the output, not the input. The input should be a matter of professional judgment.

I believe that the Office for Standards in Education is absolutely right—in the case of Ridings school and in other cases—to point out that there is no discipline problem in schools in which classes are well taught, and that, if children's attention is engaged, most of the time there is not a discipline problem. As I said, we must support, encourage and retrain teachers who are finding it difficult to teach well.

I believe that we should look rather more carefully at the policy of integrating so many children into mainstream classes so often, because it puts an enormous pressure on even the most highly motivated teacher. The other day, I spoke to a textile teacher who could not allow one child on to a sewing machine, as he would probably hurt himself, although she could let him participate in the art class, because he can draw peacefully. The problem is that the child might then feel discriminated against. Just as we have rethought the issue of asylums for mentally ill patients, we should re-examine this issue to discover whether we are asking teachers to take too many children into the mainstream.

I believe—it will come as no surprise to my hon. Friend the Minister of State—that we should continue to encourage, and extend enormously, the use of volunteers in schools. Community Service Volunteers—of which I am a trustee—has developed a strategy for persuading local firms to release some of their employees into local schools during the lunch hour. The programme is enormously supportive of schools and of children, who may be slow learners or very fast learners. It is also extraordinarily good for employees, who learn many new skills which they had not realised that they had.

In the current climate, the idea of reintroducing corporal punishment in schools is absurd. The proposition that children—most of whom have had far too much violence in their background—should be beaten at school is absurd. In principle, I am not against corporal punishment in cases in which schools are supportive of pupils, pupils understand the use of it and parents support it. Most of the children we are talking about beating, however, are not in that situation. Moreover, their parents would be grossly unsupportive.

I do not think that we are doing nearly enough about peer learning and service learning. It has been well demonstrated that if one teaches someone something didactically, those taught will retain about 5 per cent. of the subject matter. If they are then asked to demonstrate

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what has been learnt, they retain about 15 per cent. of it. If they are then encouraged to teach what they have learnt to another child, they will retain about 75 or 80 per cent. of it. I believe that there is enormous scope for using in schools older children, and university students who volunteer, to reinforce what children are learning. Children who find it difficult to turn up regularly at school are greatly motivated to come in if they have a younger child dependent on their appearance for a little extra coaching.

Service learning also has enormous potential. Service learning is regarded by many schools as a very valuable extra add-on if they have the time. However, going out into the community, measuring old people's homes and backyards, estimating quantities of paint, for example, and then buying it not only motivates children—who suddenly see the point of all that boring mathematics or geometry—but bridges the gap between the generations in a community. It brings the community and the school together. Service learning, far from being a bolt-on extra, is fundamental to learning.

I do not know why indiscipline has increased, but perhaps it is partly due to the fact that children are entering puberty earlier, they have greater physical size and strength than they had before and they have a much longer period without being entrusted with responsibility. It is very interesting that schools that have done best at getting rid of bullying are the schools that have asked children to take a substantial responsibility. We do not trust our children with nearly enough responsibility.

7.53 pm

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I have already spoken on the Education Bill, in last week's Queen's Speech debate, so I shall be brief. I agree entirely with the emphasis that all hon. Members and the Government have placed on standards. We live in a time of tremendous challenge and constant change. The creation of a learning society is essential, and education has become a crucial Government function and responsibility.

The Government have decided that they wish to encourage higher standards through the establishment of competition. They wish to encourage competition among schools, which will compete for pupils; among parents and children, who will compete for places in schools; and among service providers, who will compete to provide services to schools. All of that is backed up by a testing regime for pupils, which is geared to the publication of league tables and is supposed to provide information in the competitive process. On top of that, there is an inspection regime, which is intended to keep teachers on their toes in this competitive race.

As I have argued before, I believe that that is a seriously dysfunctional model. It is not relevant to Wales, and it is not acceptable in Wales. However, that is not to deny the need for processes to achieve excellence, rigour and rising standards in our schools. In this debate, I should like to examine some of the Bill's provisions and consider how relevant or irrelevant they might be in creating a system for ensuring excellence in schools in Wales—a pattern that, at some stage, might be emulated, even in England.

Part VII of the Bill provides for the creation of a Qualifications and National Curriculum Authority by merging the two bodies that currently cover curriculum in schools and vocational qualifications. That is a step in the right direction. If we are legislating for the needs of Wales, however—which is what we are supposed to be doing—we must be far more radical. Currently there is an inefficient division of functions in Wales, with an inefficient organisational structure to match. There is every reason for merging the Qualifications, Curriculum and National Authority—the new body—and the Welsh Joint Education Committee, to provide a single body that is responsible for assessment, testing and examination. Such a change would achieve the same results, because a merged body would perform the same functions.

The same body would be responsible for curriculum development. Is it not right to link curriculum development with assessment of how the curriculum is being delivered? It would give us a far more efficient—including cost-efficient—cohesive and effective approach.

More controversially, I would incorporate into the merged body—albeit in distinct departments—two other functions: an inspectorate, which is currently based at the Welsh Office; and the advisory services that are currently provided, at least in part, by local authorities.

Following local government reorganisation, provision of advisory services is problematic, because local authorities are smaller and simply do not have the economies of scale to provide the range of services that the old counties had. Authorities are obliged to set up ad hoc, cross-border arrangements, which are inherently unsatisfactory. I think that a high-quality advisory service can be achieved if it is operated at an all-Wales level, although many of its personnel would be placed locally.

The inspection process within my model would be very different from the current, threatening—it is threatening, as teachers' experience tells us—model. The inspection process in my model would involve constant, interactive inspection, with the provision of support, advice and professional development.

The Welsh education body that we would create, which could be called CAIG—Cyngor Addysg I Gymru—would consist not of Welsh Office appointees, but of the representatives of interested parties, particularly local authorities. The integration of functions at an all-Wales level would make good sense and would provide a powerful mechanism for raising standards, which is much needed in some parts of Wales.

I support the proposals in part VI for compulsory base line testing. I have no difficulty with that. Base line testing and comparisons based on the information gathered from it are essential to monitor the progress of individual pupils and to identify their needs, as well as to monitor the effectiveness of schools in achieving pupils' cognitive development at various stages. The subsequent test results would give information on schools' successes. Those results would have to be provided to CAIG, our Welsh education council, which would have the power to intervene to provide analysis of the reasons for any failure and to offer support.

Part VIII provides for the inspection of some local education authority functions by the current inspection system. Using the existing inspectorate is objectionable. Local education authorities are democratic bodies and are already subjected to too much central Government diktat.

My party's proposals for CAIG include the provision of advice and expert analysis to local education authorities in their administrative functions and to governing bodies, which certainly need such advice and support. The aim is to encourage efficiency and good practice. That would not be an imposition on local authorities, because CAIG would be their organisation, and would also contain representatives of governing bodies.

I oppose the provisions in part IV to encourage the growth of the grant-maintained sector. Local education authorities alone should be responsible for funding public sector schools, which are the majority in Wales, where we have a very small private sector, and for strategic functions. However, that should be within a national framework, because education, as we say, is a national service delivered locally. The national level should therefore have an input on the way in which that strategic function should be discharged. In any case, the funding for schools comes largely from the block grant.

It is therefore important for local education authorities to be able to show that they have an effective strategy for providing places in their areas. They should be obliged to provide central Government—whether in the United Kingdom as a whole or a Welsh central Government—with a schools structure plan, just as they currently have to bring forward a structure plan for the planning process. That would form part of the discussion in the negotiation process for allocating block grant.

There will be opportunities at a later stage to elaborate on some of the ideas that would help to create a first-rate education system in my country, Wales. I would like to believe that the Bill could be amended to incorporate some of them, but you will understand my scepticism on that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Nevertheless, I hope to table some amendments later for more detailed debate.

I hope that we shall soon be able to legislate specifically for the Welsh education system from the right place—from Wales, not from here. The quality of the Bill shows the need for that.

8.4 pm

Mr. Michael Carttiss (Great Yarmouth): The hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) said that she had heard all the arguments about selection 30 years ago. So have we all. The argument today, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out when introducing the Bill this afternoon, is not about dividing children in an 11-plus examination between grammar and secondary modern schools, as the hon. Members for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) and for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) seem to imagine. It is about a genuine endeavour to relate schools to certain strengths and giving children the opportunity to develop their strengths to the full in the most favourable educational environment for the subjects for which they have special talents—be they languages, technology, music or science. I do not need to read the Bill again to know that, in establishing grammar schools, we are not talking about establishing secondary moderns. All the arguments from Opposition Members on that showed that old-fashioned socialism is still as strong as ever.

The ability to develop strengths in certain subjects and to specialise in them is one of the great advantages of the new grant-maintained system, which the Bill will enhance. One of the first schools in Norfolk to take advantage of the 1988 legislation that created grant-maintained status was the West Flegg middle school in Martham, in my constituency. That school has gone forward from success to success.

I would welcome a visit by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) and his Front-Bench colleagues to that school. They might like to make some vain efforts to help my local Labour candidate, who will need all the help that he can get from them. If they took time off to visit West Flegg school, which serves a district that is in no way affluent—quite the reverse—perhaps they would change their minds about abolishing the grant-maintained system. That supposes that they are susceptible to considering issues objectively in the interests of the children whom we are all here to represent rather than from the point of view of the socialist dogma that we hear all the time from them, despite new Labour.

There are six comprehensive high schools in my constituency. There are no grammar schools or special schools such as those that some of my hon. Friends representing larger areas have described. Five of those schools have grant-maintained status. If that proportion of grant-maintained schools to local authority schools were replicated in every constituency in England and Wales, our education system would be truly responsive to local community needs and to parents' requirements of choice and high standards.

I welcome the Bill's proposals on discipline. I listened to the interview of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the Radio 4 "Today" programme, when she said that she was not against the use of the cane in schools. When pressed on the issue, she said that any amendments to the Bill would be looked at. I did not interpret that as meaning that the Government had changed their policy. I interpreted it as a Minister with an open mind being ready to look at other proposals made by my right hon. and hon. Friends in addition to those suggested by the Government. Only a weak Minister would refuse to consider any amendments put forward by her right hon. and hon. Friends.

I do not think that corporal punishment is the answer to the discipline problem. I went to a school in the 1950s where the cane was rarely used. I taught in a school in the 1960s where the cane was often used. I taught in another school where it was banned by the headmaster and was not available to the teachers. I cannot say that the standards of behaviour were significantly different in any of those schools. I do not think that the cane is a significant factor in discipline. Discipline needs the right sort of teachers and proper training. It is not about class size—we have heard that the Ridings school had a good teacher-pupil ratio—but about the quality of teachers. Nevertheless, it is wrong for politicians to tell schools that the cane is a sanction that they must not use. We should make it available to schools, but whether they want to use it is very much for them to determine. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) that it might be an alternative to suspension. If it were to prove effective in dealing with unacceptable behaviour, it would be an improvement on barring a child from school.

I welcome the fact that the Bill will strengthen the ability of schools to deal with pupils' bad behaviour and that it will place a duty on local education authorities—this is one of its most important aspects—to draw up and publish a plan setting out what forms of support they will provide for schools to deal with disruptive pupils. Far too

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often a school decides that certain pupils should not be there but there is nowhere suitable for those children to go. I again agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth that they are the very pupils for whom we should be providing places. If the cane will encourage some disruptive children to behave better, the facility should be available to schools.

I welcome the objective of promoting diversity among schools and choice for parents and of giving grant-maintained schools more power to develop their identity without central approval. However, I have one caveat with regard to central approval. It relates to the power to establish sixth forms at grant-maintained schools which do not already have them. I am happy that that power should exist but I sound a cautionary note—such sixth forms must be viable and capable of offering a wide range of choices for post-16 education.

If the five grant-maintained schools in my constituency all opted to have their own sixth forms, there could be major problems and we could end up with less choice of sixth form subjects, especially for pupils preparing for university, than is now provided by our sixth form college and our college of further education. Resources could be a problem, and we need assurances from the Secretary of State about where the money is to come from. It is all very well to give grant-maintained schools the power to set up their own sixth forms, but one has to have the money to provide the staff and other resources needed for post-16 education.

Other than that one reservation about removing from the Secretary of State the power to consider and approve or reject proposals for a school to set up a sixth form—I hope that the issue can be dealt with in Committee—I am happy to give the Bill my full support.

8.11 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): I pick up on the remarks of the hon. Member for Croydon, North–East (Mr. Congdon), who said that a future of Secretary of State should inspect the role of Mr. Christopher Woodhead, the chief inspector of schools. I hope that, in doing so, the future Secretary of State will consider the cost of reinspecting primary teacher education undertaken when the results of the first inspection did not prove satisfactory to the Government. I hope that the Secretary of State will consider the motivation behind the choice of institution to be inspected, the decision to add others and the alteration of inspection reports by Mr. Woodhead and that, having done that, he will sack him.

The problem for local education authorities has always been to balance parental choice with adequate provision for all children in the right places. In other words, the task of the LEAs has been to create a system as close as possible to a universal service in which no child is disadvantaged or short-changed. The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) was right to point out the huge responsibilities of LEAs in this respect and right to say that it is not always the Government's fault when things go wrong. LEAs get it wrong sometimes, governors get it wrong sometimes and the Government get it wrong most of the time.

Virtually every Tory education reform of the past 17 years has made the balance that LEAs should be trying to achieve less and less possible and made real choice for the majority of parents and children more and more difficult.

We are now in an era of admissions by appeals panel. Many local education authorities and secondary schools are already wrestling with the destructive consequences of raw league tables. Fluctuating results cause fluctuating intakes, which leads to loss of revenue and, in turn, to more difficulty in raising a school's position in the league table. That ratchet effect leads inexorably to the creation of what have this evening been called sink schools.

Some schools seek to avoid taking pupils with special educational needs or those with disabilities as they foresee damage to their league table position. Some schools even take extraordinary steps to get rid of pupils halfway through their secondary career—often at enormous expense to the local authorities involved—if they think that those pupils might damage their league table position.

Any school is likely to have a bad year, just as any school is likely to have a good year. The consequences of that are serious not only for the school itself but for neighbouring schools with which it has been forced to compete for numbers and, therefore, of course, for revenue. The creation of grant-maintained schools and city technology colleges has, in some areas, exacerbated the problem. Their extra funding and enhanced status has further destabilised the education system in those areas. The Bill will accelerate selection, which is not only massively unpopular with the population at large but exacerbates the ratchet effect on schools that are already less favoured.

The proposal to give the Funding Agency for Schools powers to initiate grant-maintained schools anywhere effectively gives the FAS the right to extend its own statutory powers where it can trigger the 10 per cent. requirement. The proposal in clause 3 to allow grant-maintained schools to expand by up to 50 per cent., and the proposal in clause 4 to allow them to select up to 50 per cent. in secondary schools and 20 per cent. in primaries, without the requirement to publish statutory proposals, is a further complication of any LEA's ability to plan provision sensibly.

This Conservative Government have always seemed to believe that schools operate in isolation and that if any school at any time has got it right and is content in itself—good luck to any school that is—that is the end of the story. However, schools do not exist in isolation—at least not many do so. In fact, they exist in competition with each other. What happens to them—how they change and fluctuate—affects all the others around them, hence the need for debates and inquiries. A detailed consultation is taking place in my own town of Ormskirk, where it is sensibly being proposed to amalgamate the grammar school—it is called a grammar school, but it is in fact a comprehensive—with another comprehensive.

The proposal to allow county and voluntary schools to select 20 per cent.—or 30 per cent. at special schools—without publishing statutory proposals goes even further in destabilising the system. Grant-maintained schools' new powers to create nursery classes and sixth forms will,

as has been said, disrupt not only the planning of admissions by schools all around them but the planning of FE colleges in the neighbourhood, at least in respect of sixth forms. Schools that resist selection are close to being forced into accepting it by clause 2, which will initiate a compulsory annual review by governors of selection proposals.

What a school does in terms of selection or of increasing admissions has a profound effect on all surrounding schools; perfectly good schools can be destroyed through no fault of their own. At least the statutory publication of the intention to change allowed the knock-on effects to be analysed and debated, but of course such debate does not suit the Government's purpose, which is to introduce not a two-tier system—I agree with the Secretary of State on that—but a three-tier system, of grant-maintained schools, county and voluntary schools that select, and non-selective schools that will become a version of secondary moderns. In effect, the comprehensive system will be ended.

Many Conservative Members say that it is possible to have selective and comprehensive schools in the same area, but logically that is nonsense; a comprehensive school cannot exist alongside selective schools—we could call it something else, but it would not be a comprehensive school. What is worse, the Government's proposals could create a two-tier system within schools, the tiers consisting of the 20 per cent., say, who are selected, and the others—two different species within the same walls.

The Government want to create a system in which schools select pupils—that cannot be reiterated too often—and in which only a minority of parents and pupils will select their schools. In the Queen's Speech debate on education, the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth said:

"Schools should have a greater say in choosing the children whom they take in."

Mr. Pawsey: That was not me.

Mr. Pickthall: I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon; it was the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold). The hon. Gentleman in fact said:

"The new education Bill will give schools greater freedom to select pupils by ability."—[*Official Report*, 29 October 1996; Vol. 284, c. 483, 502.]

That is all about the right of schools—but only certain schools—to select pupils; it does not enhance parental choice except for the relatively few parents who are confident that their children are sufficiently intelligent, well dressed and well spoken to be selected.

It is hard to escape the conclusion that the whole nasty process has only two fundamental reasons for existence. The first is to destabilise and destroy local education authorities and their power to plan education in their areas. The Government should come out and say, as the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth surely would, that they want to destroy local education authorities and to centralise everything; that would at least be honest.

The second reason—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up. I call Mr. David Lidington.

8.22 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): The test of the Bill is whether and to what extent it succeeds in driving up education standards of achievement throughout the state sector. I am especially glad that the Government have decided to implement the recommendations of the Dearing review of education for 14 to 19-year-olds and merge the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority with the National Council for Vocational Qualifications, because that administrative change is part of a necessary drive by Government, local education authorities and the teaching profession to improve standards for that age group.

I disagree with much of what I have heard from Opposition Members in the debate, but I agree that the education system has provided a good standard of education for the academically gifted ever since the Education Act 1944, and perhaps before; that was achieved not only through the traditional grammar school sector, but—let us be honest with ourselves—through the better comprehensive schools. But however secondary education has been organised, we have failed as a nation to match the achievements of our European and other competitor nations in providing a high-quality education for children in their early to middle teens who are not best suited to traditional academic courses.

One of the great achievements of the Government's reforms of recent years is the introduction of the general national vocational qualification. When the new authority is established, it should do everything possible to strengthen both the rigour and the reputation of the GNVQ. It is nonsensical for us to be in the position to which Dearing drew attention, in which about 16,000 different qualifications are available for 16 to 19-year-old students, and universities and employers alike are faced with a blizzard of acronyms and certificates, the worth of which they do not understand.

In recent months, I have visited several schools in my constituency that have been introducing the GNVQ. In those schools, including one special school and three upper schools—they might traditionally have been described as secondary moderns, as Buckinghamshire has a selective system of secondary education—I was struck by the fact that students were motivated to tackle a course that seemed to them to be demanding, interesting and relevant to what they hoped to do after school. Their teachers were full of enthusiasm about what the new course could enable them to help their students to achieve.

The GNVQ is giving 16-year-olds at upper schools in Buckinghamshire an incentive to come back to school after GCSEs, not because they are unable to get jobs or to find anything better to do but because the course stimulates their ambitions and drives them on to achievements greater than those of which they had previously believed themselves capable.

That experience in Buckinghamshire gives the lie to some of what we heard from Labour Members today. I found most dismaying their crude and misleading caricature of selection by aptitude, which forms part of the Government's programme. From the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on, we heard speeches resting on two misapprehensions. First, there was the apparently wilful disregard for the unfairness of selection by mortgage, which happens in an area where people rely entirely on the neighbourhood comprehensive.

[Mr. David Lidington]

When I was the governor of a north London comprehensive in the early 1980s, I saw parents desperately visiting estate agents to find a house on the right side of the road so that they could be in the catchment area of the popular school in the borough.

Secondly, unjustifiable support was given to the myth that only the traditional selective grammar schools can achieve great things for their pupils. I am an admirer of what grammar schools in my constituency and elsewhere in Buckinghamshire are achieving, but the upper schools are also staffed by dedicated professional teachers who are equally committed to educating their charges in the fullest sense and drawing out of them everything of which they are capable.

The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), will know that Holmer Green upper school in her constituency was singled out by the chief inspector of schools in his annual report as one of the 200 schools that deserved praise for outstanding achievement. In a selective system, that school admits pupils who are not the most academically gifted.

I hope that we can move towards a system incorporating the national curriculum and specialisms that vary from one school to another, with one school offering languages, another computer science and another the fine arts, in addition to the core curriculum prescribed by statute and by order.

Since 1944, secondary moderns have been seen as the dumping ground—schools that could never do well for their pupils. Instead of putting that right, we decided to break up the grammar school system that was achieving results for its pupils. We tackled the problem from the wrong end.

I hope that in future my hon. Friends on the Front Bench will push the experiment further. We need to look closely at the experiment with charter schools in the United States, to see whether it provides a precedent that we might usefully copy. I am also attracted by some of the ideas proposed in a characteristically stimulating and idiosyncratic way by my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden). Although the hon. Member for Brightside was keen to quote a couple of remarks by my hon. Friend out of context, he omitted to mention my hon. Friend's utter commitment to selection and the restoration of something equivalent to the old direct grant schools.

Education is about developing all the talents, abilities and faculties of every young man and woman in Britain. To achieve that, we need to develop a culture of high expectation among teachers, parents, local education authorities and the students themselves. I support the Bill because I believe that it will contribute to that objective.

8.31 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I shall pick up two concepts that underpin the Government's thinking on the Bill: choice and selection. I speak not as an expert on the education system, but as someone whose experience of it marred my outlook on education for life. I was an 11-plus failure.

Before I come to selection, I should like to make one or two points about the concept of choice in education. We all believe that, as far as possible, people should be able to exercise choice in respect of their children's education. However, not everybody starts from the same standpoint. People have different abilities to exercise choice. I hope that the Government will reflect on that during future debates on the Bill.

Let me give the House some examples. People have different abilities to get their children to the school of their choice. Many of my constituents do not have access to cars or even public transport. We must also consider parents' ability to take their children to schools other than the neighbourhood school. That depends on a number of factors, including transport and the number of hours that someone is required to work. The Government desperately defend people being able to work for more than 48 hours a week, but those who work long hours sometimes find it difficult to take their children to school and to pick them up afterwards. People with disabilities also have problems getting their children to school, so the concept of choice needs to be seen in perspective.

In some respects, one person's positive choice is another person's limitation. As the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) said, there are winners and losers. That also applies to selection. I hope that we shall never return to the selective system with which I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s. I have a lasting memory of taking my 11-plus as an A-stream pupil who had come joint top of the class three years earlier. I was expected to pass with flying colours. I have a lasting memory of standing on the stage with my year at Lawefield Lane junior school, which is an excellent school in my constituency of Wakefield, when the head teacher read out the list of those who had passed and my name was not among them. Those who had passed were applauded off the stage while those who had failed just stood there. I went home ashamed of the fact that, from then on, I was a certified failure.

That had a major impact on me. I suspect that it is one of the reasons why I ended up here. It made me a socialist, questioning the circumstances that resulted in my being written off and sent to a secondary modern school. The only silver lining in that cloud was that the secondary modern school that I attended played rugby league. If I had gone to a grammar school, I would have played rugby union, so I am grateful for that. However, I make the serious point that the experience marred me and vast numbers of others.

Our perception of ourselves as failures and write-offs stayed with us for a long time. In some respects, that experience of failing the 11-plus affected our self-confidence for life.

I am concerned that the potential of a whole generation was written off. People who were far more academically able than me went to secondary modern schools and did not have the opportunity to take O-levels, A-levels and degrees. We had what was called a college of preceptors. Has anyone heard of them? The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) nods. What use were they when we attempted to obtain employment, as no one had heard of them?

There was also corporal punishment. The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth should bear this in mind when he moves his amendment on the issue. My form teacher of form 1J in the secondary modern school was the deputy

head who, every week, dealt out corporal punishment in front of the class. All the lads were lined up and caned in front of the class. I found it remarkable that every week the same lads received corporal punishment. They came back week in, week out. It did not seem to be a tremendous deterrent. It also became a macho status symbol. It proved one to be a hard man, so some practically volunteered for corporal punishment.

The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth and others of the Jurassic Park tendency should not give us this nonsense. They may be scraping around for every vote that they can get because they are desperate to win the election, but the proposal is utter nonsense and they jolly well know it.

I have followed closely events at the Ridings school in Halifax. I am desperately concerned that we do not return to the system that I experienced as a youngster—that is what I consider to be the experience of the youngsters in Halifax, which is very near my constituency of Wakefield. I was interested in the comments last Thursday by the Ofsted director of inspection, Mike Tomlinson, when the report on that school came out. He was quoted in an article in the *Yorkshire Post* last Thursday, which said:

"he described The Ridings as 'in a sense' a secondary modern school."

The reason for the problems that we have in Halifax is that Halifax's Conservative group, which was in control for years, retained the 11-plus—the old system under which I and millions of others suffered. The youngsters at the Ridings school perceive themselves as write-offs and as no-hopers. Is it any wonder that problems arise? They were told that they were failures.

The Bill worries me because no lessons have been learnt from the Ridings experience. It is all about recreating, across the country, the circumstances that created the Ridings in Halifax. As someone who has children in the state system in my constituency, it saddens me that, if the Bill goes through, my children could suffer—my daughter, who is only eight, might be affected by this measure. Like you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and generations of others, I went into politics to improve the circumstances of those who came after me. I know what I went through and I do not want those who follow me to go through the same.

8.40 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I should like to say to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) that, although we listened with great interest to his story of failure, we did not feel that he has failed—we thought that he has done rather well to rise to sit on the Benches that have so many grammar school pupils on them. The Labour party, which is close to grammar schools and their achievements, has clearly found a way to welcome him, so he should not regard himself as having been scarred for life or as having permanently failed.

We should welcome the Bill because it is a Bill of substance that will effect real change in the right direction. There have been a number of Bills that deal with education in the past 10 years. Unfortunately, when we came to power in 1979, attitudes in teaching and the schools sector were so negative that we had to get to a neutral position before we could effect some of the changes we wanted. That meant that, until 1988, the Government passed little education legislation. Since 1988, however, we have passed a series of very good measures that are transforming education. We have introduced grant-maintained status for some schools, teacher appraisal and the national curriculum and testing. We have reintroduced selection where people want it. We have also introduced an excellent assisted places scheme. Those are some of the changes that we have made, and they are working.

Education is enormously important to this country. It is where the opportunities for our people are found and where our future opportunities—in terms of our economic position and our worldwide competitiveness—will be. We have to make sure that we take advantage of those opportunities in the marketplace, in trading and in business. We can do that through a successful education policy.

Labour Members talk about education, but they are divided. With their mouths they talk about supporting standards, but in their hearts they know that the words uttered from their mouths are wrong and they send their children to schools that are based on sound Conservative principles. They simply do not believe what they say.

Where have Labour policies on schools succeeded? Labour has been in charge of the education system in Islington for approximately 25 years, yet Islington has one of the worst education records in the country. If Labour cannot get it right after 25 years, how can Labour Members stand up and make speeches about how to get it right? It is scandalous. If they have an ounce of honesty, Labour Members must admit that they cannot run the nation's schools and that, wherever Labour has run schools, it has run them badly.

In my constituency, we had Conservative control for many years—sadly, we have now declined to a state of affairs in which Labour and the Liberal Democrats are running Kent county council. During the years of Conservative control, however, it was not money that created Kent schools' academic success but rigid discipline and well-managed schools. I try to visit two or three schools a month in my constituency during the school term and the changes that have occurred in the past 10 years are enormously impressive.

Much has happened: standards are high and getting better all the time, and teachers operate to a high standard of discipline. I can see the enormous change that has taken place since I first started to visit schools in my constituency some 10 years ago. We have a selective system, although we have one comprehensive—a Roman Catholic school, St. Edmunds—which is enormously successful. It operates a disciplined, academic system that is, in many ways, much closer to a grammar school structure. We have two successful grammar schools into which many parents want to get their children.

We have several secondary schools that have developing sixth forms. They have developed them throughout the past 20 years under the Conservative-controlled county council. I hasten to add that those sixth forms were technically illegal, but we have just managed to get them made legal. We managed to find the resources for them within the schools' budgets and, as a result, we have a very successful system. Even the Labour parliamentary candidate for Dover approves of our grammar school system and sends his children to such schools.

[Mr. David Shaw]

We also have a good private school called Dover college, which employs 250 people locally—no small number. It is an export earner because children from all over the world come to the college. What is important is that it now has approximately 28 assisted places, not for children from middle-income families, but for the children of single—never-married in some cases—mothers, who were destined to suffer from a terrible lack of opportunity in life. Those children are being given the opportunity to receive a high-quality education at Dover college alongside international pupils—an opportunity that they would not have had otherwise. That shows that the assisted places scheme is working.

Standards are rising considerably as a result of reforms such as the national curriculum and testing. Publishing the results of the tests makes the difference, as it enables parents to determine whether schools are succeeding. I notice that Opposition Members are split on the subject of the schools inspectorate—today, we have heard one Opposition Member calling for Mr. Woodhead to be sacked and another supporting and wanting to promote him. I am especially pleased to see that, under clauses 54 to 58, inspections are to be extended to cover local education authorities, which means that we shall get a proper look at some of the weak authorities. All of us on the Conservative Benches know which authorities need to be opened up to inspection. I hope that we shall find out which authorities are lacking in interest, concern and effective school management.

The models of good practice in school performance that the Department for Education and Employment has published on its Internet site deserve a mention. As one who is interested in the information super-highway, I welcome the fact that the Department is using the Internet to ensure that teachers and others interested in education have access to a site that is devoted to improving schools and standards in them. I congratulate the Department on taking advantage of the information super-highway.

The issue of teachers is very important. The Bill would benefit from including reform of teachers' trade unions. Many teachers' trade unions have failed teachers and pupils. Research in the United States shows that schools with a high trade union concentration have a higher than average drop-out rate.

We must make teachers professionals and role models. The nation wants respect for teachers and it would help if they dressed properly. Most professions have some form of dress code and the majority of teachers operate to a high standard. I hope that a clause can be included in the Bill to enable governing bodies and head teachers to look at the possibility of introducing a dress code. We now know that Labour Members of Parliament are improving their dress standards, and it is important to encourage other professions to do so as well. There need not be a standard dress, but dress must be appropriate for the circumstances.

The Government are effecting good change in our schools. We are seeing real improvements in education and I congratulate the authors of this first-rate Bill.

8.50 pm

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): When Britain lies 35th out of 48 in the international education league and we achieve only half as many good grades at GCSE as the French and the Germans, and when one in five of our very young children fails to achieve the expected standard of reading at age seven, the Government ask us to consider a Bill ridden with political dogma and devoid of pragmatic good sense. The Bill is about the political interests of the Tories, not the education standards of children.

The Secretary of State has already ensured that the focus of the debate will be on whether we should whack children with canes rather than on the crucial issue of how Britain's children can do better.

The Government are running out of time and steam. Their only good ideas are those that they have pinched from the Labour party. Who has been talking about home-school contracts? Who has developed them on the ground? The Labour party and Labour-controlled councils. Who has promoted the policy that local education authorities should be inspected? The Labour party. Who has developed base line assessments for five-year-olds? The Labour party and Labour-controlled councils.

Any acknowledgement by the Conservatives that the best education policies are Labour policies is welcome, and I am delighted that the Secretary of State has taken this opportunity to introduce a clause on the regulation of supply teachers. That is a pleasing U-turn by the Conservative party, as when I introduced my ten-minute Bill on that very matter in July not one Conservative Member supported me; indeed, many, including some hon. Members present today, chose to oppose me.

The proper regulation of supply teachers and the private agencies that provide them is vital for our children. Not only are they at risk, as I demonstrated in my speech in July, but, with up to one in 15 classes likely to be taught by a supply teacher, the quality of those teachers must be central to the concern of those who wish to raise standards. In September, I conducted a survey and found that a third of secondary schools in London have experienced problems with agency supply teachers. One school described the teachers sent by the agency as "childminders with worksheets". Another talked of teachers who simply "babysat the class". We learnt of agency supply teachers who arrived late, came unsuitably dressed or who, because they had no experience of multi-racial schools, displayed racist behaviour. Head teachers talked about the poor quality of some supply teachers, their failure to maintain discipline, and their frequent lack of knowledge of the UK education system and the national curriculum. At worst, the agencies sent people who were too ill, unfit or drunk to teach.

I am glad that the Government have finally agreed with me that there is a problem. The Bill, however, is not drawn as tightly as necessary and will not be effective. Why will not the Government, just for once, abandon their dogma of deregulation, which prevents them from taking essential steps to regulate not just the teachers but the agencies that provide them? Anybody can set up an agency. The checks are minimal. All that is needed is a telephone—even a mobile will do. During my research on the issue, I found somebody who is on the Department for Education and Employment's list 99 of people barred from teaching—managing an agency in Manchester. One unscrupulous operator who ran an agency called "First Quality Supply Teachers" fled the country owing his clients about £2 million and leaving teachers from Portsmouth to Newcastle without the money that they had

earned and the jobs that they needed. When the director of education in Durham wrote to officials in the Department for Education and Employment expressing his grave concern arising out of that case, he was told:

"the agencies have nothing to do with us anyway, they are the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry."

The Government must face up to the truth: deregulation does not solve problems, but can create them. The proper regulation of supply teacher agencies and teachers is vital if our children are to be properly protected and the quality of their teaching maintained.

I shall now deal with the Conservative obsession with selection—or rather the Prime Minister's obsession with selection. We know from the Secretary of State's record in Norfolk that she does not approve of grammar schools because she played a pivotal role in forcing the closure of every grammar school in Norfolk. They were not bad schools. Some of them were extremely good, with splendid results and impressive reputations, but the Secretary of State and her colleagues got rid of them for the simple reason that they were selective. She seemed to understand then what she fails to understand now: a grammar school in every town will not extend choice, but will have the opposite effect. Forget the rhetoric. If the Government's proposals come into force, fewer parents will be able to choose where their child goes to school. Selection by ability means that schools can choose the pupils, and parents are left disempowered.

We want real choice for parents and their children, but the way in which we increase choice and extend opportunity is by improving all schools, not just grant-maintained schools, grammar schools or city technology colleges. If all schools were good, parents and children could exercise real choice. By concentrating on only a few schools and leaving the rest to rot, the Government have caused untold anxiety among parents desperate to get their kids into the only decent school in the area. That is why parents are so angry with the Government. The Government focus on structure when they should focus on standards; they focus on selection when they should focus on standards; and they focus on the few when they should focus on standards for all.

The Secretary of State has been forced to introduce selection in this Bill because the Prime Minister wants to develop the so-called "clear blue water" between the Conservative and Labour parties. Yet again, he has bungled it and simply created another opportunity for highlighting divisions within his party. What do we find? The Conservative jewel in its local government crown—Westminster—says in its submission that

"the result of this could be fewer, rather than more, satisfied parents."

We see Conservative-controlled Bromley tearing its hair out as increasing selection means that local children find that they cannot have any place at any school in that borough. We find that only 15 of the 15,000 organisations that responded to the Government's consultation favoured increased selection.

The proposals are irrelevant. They have nothing to do with choice and diversity and everything to do with politics and prejudice. The same goes for the proposal to extend the assisted places scheme. We know that most Conservative Members have so little confidence in state schools that they send their children to private schools. That must be the only explanation for the wasteful proposal to expand the assisted places scheme, for who on earth can justify spending up to £9,543 to send just one child to Charterhouse school while state schools are told to stick to £2,600 per child in the secondary sector? The assisted places scheme is not fair, does not represent value for money and is not effective in raising standards for all our children. It is plain common sense that money would be better spent on children in their first years in primary school. That is why Labour's pledge to use the money to reduce class sizes is so popular with parents.

We all know that our future depends on our ability to raise the skills—and improve the standards—of our young people. We cannot afford to waste precious time on irrelevancies, and the Bill is full of irrelevancies. Out there people do not want to hear about selection or caning; they want us to address the real issues—better schools, better teaching, better heads. By wasting yet another opportunity, the Government have yet again demonstrated that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up. I call Lady Olga Maitland.

9 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): It is a bit rich for the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) to lecture us on standards in education. We recall her track record when, as leader of Islington council responsible for education, she turned the schools there into a rock-bottom disaster. The record still stands.

I welcome the Bill, which brings up to date a range of legislation that the Government have introduced over the years to improve our children's opportunities and life chances. It is ironic that our achievements may have been best assessed by an article that was published in *The Guardian* on 2 September. After all, *The Guardian* is no friend of the Conservatives. The article bore the headline

"Why the Tories have won over education".

It stated:

"Which parent can honestly say that this summer they ignored all the competitive criteria which have been imposed on education? Whether it's worrying about your child's exam results or your chosen school's SAT results, Tory educational values have entered our souls."

There you have it, Mr. Deputy Speaker: the mouthpiece of new Labour has confirmed that we lead on education. We have set the pace and it is unstoppable.

Although I addressed the issue of discipline in our schools at some length when I last spoke in the House on education 10 days ago, I did not dwell on the vexed topic of caning. That was deliberate. I was waiting to see whether amendments would be tabled in that regard. As they will be, and as I gather that there will be free votes for Members on the Back Benches, I feel that it is right to declare where I stand.

I shall not be joining my colleagues in the Lobby seeking corporal punishment. That will be entirely my choice, not a case of being obedient to the Whips because I am on the payroll. I find the notion of corporal punishment abhorrent in a civilised society such as that in which we live, where we declare that differences can be resolved by debate, persuasion or even arguments, but never by resort to violence. Yet it is advocated that, as a last resort, schools should have the right to use the cane.

[Lady Olga Maitland]

I do not believe that misbehaviour should ever be matched by deliberate violence on the part of the teacher. That reduces the teacher to the level of the miscreant. It demeans and degrades both. I doubt whether the pupil will learn much from the experience; he is more likely to gain bravado from his friends. Caning would not have restored order in the Ridings school—if anything, it may have made the pupils more violent. I discussed the issue with head teachers in my constituency and I found that they are dead set against caning. They would never use the cane, and I find it hard to believe that anyone other than a sadist would.

I believe that good, firm, fair and effective discipline is possible. I have seen wretched bin schools turned around, as occurred in a school in Sutton, where a boy was caught riding a motor bike through the school corridors. The secret of success is leadership and determination to give the pupils clear rules regarding acceptable behaviour and to impose punishment when those rules are breached.

I particularly welcome the new powers for head teachers allowing them to impose after-school detention without seeking parental permission, which is sometimes refused. Ideally, I would prefer the detention to take place on the same day as the misbehaviour occurred, thus giving the punishment a sense of immediacy and meaning. Delaying punishment by 24 hours to inform parents weakens its effect. It is perfectly possible to telephone parents and warn them that their child will be home late—although I accept that there may be some practical implications.

I regret the Labour party's negative approach to the assisted places scheme and to its extension to include primary schools. The assisted places scheme has proved extremely popular and is much appreciated by parents in my constituency. The Labour party's hostility is a sad reflection of old Labour: resenting one child's chance to better himself. I particularly regret the Opposition's decision to scrap the scheme on the ground that the £118 million saved would be used immediately to cut class sizes.

That decision would achieve that objective, but it would provide only one more teacher for every eight schools. In addition, places would have to be found for 34,000 pupils in schools, which negates any projected savings from the scheme at a stroke. Would the scheme be abolished overnight as the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) has called for, or would it be phased out gradually, as the Leader of the Opposition has suggested? It appears to be a source of unending confusion in the Labour party, with the Leader of the Opposition saying one thing and the party saying another.

The heart of the Bill, which reflects the ethos of Conservative thinking, is expanding choice and diversity. There is an enormous gulf between us and the Labour party in that regard. We have always believed that real freedom involves people having the right to choose rather than having decisions foisted upon them, as the Opposition favour. Hence, it is important to allow schools to develop specialties, with departments geared to a high level of expertise in languages, the arts, music, technology and sport.

It is common sense to allow parents to opt for a school that selects pupils on the basis of their aptitude and ability in a particular field, be it academic or vocational. Parents have a wider choice of schooling to suit their child and the schools are able to select students according to what they have to offer. It would be nonsense to force such schools to take pupils who do not have the talents that allow them to benefit from specialised learning. Such children would be better off attending a well-run, grant-maintained, non-selective school such as Cheam high school in my constituency, where children do well and are educated according to their needs. As a result, it has a thriving sixth form with 200 children taking A-levels and going on to university.

Grant-maintained schools have proved a resounding success. More than 1,100 schools now achieve well above average academic results, including three in my constituency which are oversubscribed. The clock cannot be turned back. The momentum is too great. We must set our children free to develop and achieve. That is why I welcome the Bill, for it does so much to maintain the momentum that we have started.

9.9 pm

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South): As my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) said earlier, if we stay here long enough, the arguments start to revolve. I have read the debates of 1987 when the Education Reform Act was still a Bill. The then Secretary of State told the House that the education system needed urgent reform. He cited evidence drawn from international comparisons, reports of Her Majesty's inspectorate and levels of adult illiteracy. Unusually in that debate, he accepted responsibility for the failures of our education system. Such a gesture has been sadly lacking in education debates of late.

The right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) told the House that the proposed Bill would "create a new framework" that would raise standards, extend choice and produce a "better educated Britain". The right hon. Gentleman made the right analysis of the problems facing our schools at that time but, unfortunately, he prescribed the wrong solution. The hidden agenda of the wrongly titled Education Reform Act 1988 was to reintroduce selective grammar schools, and bring with them the obvious necessity for schools that would be non-selective. It is obvious that if some schools have selection, some pupils will fail. They are then deemed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) said, to be non-achievers. That stigma stays with them for a long time. As someone who did not manage to pass the 11-plus, I can bear testimony to the feelings expressed by my hon. Friend.

It is surely wrong to try to determine a person's employment opportunities at the tender age of 11 years, but that was the hidden agenda of the 1988 legislation. The motivation behind the 1988 Act was to replace education consensus with political ideology, diktat and centralisation. That is apparent again today. After all, the Secretary of State has already rejected the Special Standing Committee that we, the Opposition, have requested should sit to take evidence. If we had adopted that approach, we would have been able to introduce again a consensual approach to education and to bring together everyone in that enterprise for the benefit of all pupils. It is sad that the Government, even at this late stage, are refusing to take that course.

The 1988 Act failed on two major counts. First, it failed because it did not raise standards for all our pupils. Indeed, the Act became a positive obstacle to raising

standards. The standard assessment tasks were ham-fisted and time consuming. At times, they were irrelevant. They were constantly being revised. It was only through the intervention of the Dearing review that an uneasy peace in our classrooms was restored. It should be remembered that when the review took place, we were promised a five-year moratorium. We were told that there would be five years of consolidation. Yet here we are, debating yet another Education Bill. The second failure of the 1988 Act was that it did not address the discredited selection system which failed 95 per cent. of pupils at the age of 11.

The fact that the 1988 Act failed to achieve its objectives was confirmed by the Government when they introduced what became the Education Act 1993. The right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) told the House on 9 November 1992—he echoed what the right hon. Member for Mole Valley had said four years earlier—that the Government wanted to introduce a new framework for education. The same civil servant must have written both speeches. We were told that the new framework would endure into the next century. Yet, four years on, we are faced with another Education Bill. The Bill's existence proves that the 1993 Act did not reach the landmarks set for it.

The then Secretary of State told the House that he expected that there would be 1,500 grant-maintained schools by 1 April 1994. He said also that he would eat his hat "garnished" if there was not an avalanche of GM schools before the end of the Parliament. Here we are in November 1996 with only 1,100 GM schools. The target set by the then Secretary of State in 1994 has not been reached. We are talking about only 5 per cent. of schools in our education system. So much for the success of that Act. That is why the Education Bill is before us.

After 17 years of Tory rule and the most centralised system of education ever known in this country—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), from a sedentary position, talks about grant-maintained schools. He was graceful enough to admit in Standing Committee F, which considered the Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill, that applications for grant-maintained schools had dried up. He stays silent now, because he knows that what he said then was true.

Mr. Pawsey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hall: I absolutely will not give way to the hon. Gentleman. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hall: The hon. Gentleman needs a little bit of discipline.

Miss Lestor: Cane him!

Mr. Hall: Metaphorically speaking.

After 17 years of Tory rule and the most centralised system of education ever known in this country, we face another major Education Act—the seventh in the past four years. If Conservative Members believe that the Bill is about raising standards, that is an admission that previous education legislation has failed. We have had three Acts of Parliament designed specifically to promote grant-maintained schools. This will be the fourth.

It is time that the Government got the message that the general public do not want more legislation aimed at the structures of education. We need to concentrate our attention on levering up standards for all our pupils. The Bill owes more to the past failures of education legislation and offers very little in terms of building an educational consensus for the future. It characterises the dishonesty at the heart of the Government.

The primary measure in the Bill is the extension of grant-maintained schools' ability to select up to 50 per cent. of their pupils. Such changes in school admissions policies will not be consulted upon, nor will they need the support of the local education authority or the approval of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

It is simply dishonest to claim that the reintroduction of selective grammar schools will extend parental choice. Selective grammar schools will leave schools choosing 5 per cent. of their pupils, condemning the remaining 95 per cent. as failures at the age of 11 to attend—whatever the Government want to call them—secondary modern schools.

It is simply dishonest to claim that a grammar school in every town will not turn the remaining schools in that town into secondary modern schools. Likewise, it is dishonest to claim that, by means of examination at the age of 11, one can determine the future career prospects of pupils. It is nonsense to believe that a pupil's education potential is set in stone at the age of 11, as the example of my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield and many other hon. Members can now proclaim.

The vast majority of people do not want to see a return to the discredited education apartheid achieved by selection. I quote from the editorial of *The Sunday Times* of 27 April 1992, which said:

> "To pretend that the selective opted out structure emerging as Government policy has anything to do with parental choice is a deception."

Schools will choose pupils. Parents will offer only their preference as to which school they would like their children to attend. The removal of the consultative requirements and necessary Government approval for the reintroduction of selection is wrong because it removes the democratic rights of communities to express their views on selection and to plan education provision for their area. The removal of those requirements is yet another admission by the Government that their agenda is to reintroduce selection, but it is not by the back door any more. It is open. It is overt and it is on the front of the Bill, but it does not command popular support.

If the Government need any reaffirmation of that, they need only look at the results of the local government elections in the 1970s and 1980s, when Conservative authorities that refused to introduce comprehensive education were overturned by their electorates specifically because the communities in those areas wanted a comprehensive education system for all their children. If the Government believe that the proposed legislation will have popular appeal, they are sadly wrong.

It is dishonest for people at the heart of the Government to blame LEAs for the breakdown of discipline in certain schools. It is dishonest for the Government to deny any responsibility for that breakdown. Under the terms and conditions of the Education Reform Act 1988 and the Education Act 1993, the Government have taken over

[Mr. Hall]

control of many of the day-to-day aspects of school life. They should recognise their responsibility, and own up to their failings.

It is also dishonest of certain members of the Government to claim that the reintroduction of corporal punishment will improve discipline. Requiring adults to brutalise children will serve only to make discipline worse, not better. The ritual abuse of pupils by teachers should have no place in a civilised education system.

It is also dishonest to believe that amendments to the Bill will have the authority to change the European Court ruling that outlawed assaults on schoolchildren, and that teachers want the return of corporal punishment in schools. It beggars belief that the Home Secretary is opposed to corporal punishment of convicted criminals, because he believes that it does not work, but he is in favour of adults beating children in schools, presumably because he believes that thrashing innocent pupils has a positive educational outcome.

The whole episode is made more bizarre by Ministers calling for a free vote on this issue. Those same Ministers are resisting a free vote on the private ownership of handguns. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) was absolutely right when he said that the issue panders to all that is stupid, vulgar and retrograde in our society. That applies to the whole debate.

This is a classic example of the Government getting their priorities wrong. Now they are scampering around to reposition themselves in anticipation of a leadership election following the Tory party's demise at the next election.

It is dishonest for the chairman of the Tory party to claim that reducing class sizes for five to seven-year-olds to 30 or below is wrong and harmful for the country. Reducing class sizes would be the best thing that the Government could do, and I look forward to many positive measures being adopted in the education Bill of the next Labour Government.

9.21 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I thank the hon. Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall) for shortening his speech to fit me in. None the less, I must say that almost everything he said was in the same vein as the comments that we have heard from the Opposition Benches all afternoon. In one speech after another, Labour Members said, "Let's have more of the country run the way in which Labour local education authorities run it."

I want to reply to a point that was made from a sedentary position. I intervened earlier to say that my area contained three successful grammar schools and a highly successful school that selects on the basis of technological aptitude. After I sat down, someone shouted out, "You didn't say anything about the other schools."

I shall tell the House about some of those other schools. One is an extremely successful Anglican comprehensive, another is an extremely successful Catholic school, and another is a high school that was selected by Brussels a few months ago to host the first ever EU-wide conference on the Internet. That is the type of diversity that Conservatives believe in. What would happen to those schools if we were one day to have a Labour Government?

I missed the speech by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), but I remember hearing my Liberal opponent in 1992 deliver a diatribe about the evils of grant-maintained status, without once mentioning that he had worked for most of his life at a famous public school.

I firmly support the Bill: it is an excellent measure. I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's proposals on discipline. I do not agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) about the cane, but I do not want to dwell on that subject. It is important that we do not lose sight of the measures that are firmly in the Bill, which my right hon. Friend was right to introduce. It is wrong that our courts should be willing to hold that, when a school detains a pupil without parental permission, it is deemed to be illegally detaining that pupil. I have been unable to discover the origins of that ruling.

As a result of the Bill, it will now be possible for pupils with problem parents to be disciplined. A school has always been able to keep a child back for detention if the parents agree, but the difficulty is with a problem child with problem parents who say, "No, I am not willing to have my child disciplined, and I do not mind what my child is doing to the rest of the class." We are removing the right of parents to be bad parents and to allow their children to be bad pupils. The Bill is absolutely right on that.

I want to say a few words on the issue of spiritual and moral development. My right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) made such a good speech about that earlier that I feel almost embarrassed to follow him, but I feel that there is a little more to be said on the subject. I will gladly give way to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) if he would like to intervene—

Mr. Blunkett: I would not dream of stopping the hon. Gentleman now.

Mr. Brazier: It is right for hon. Members to take an interest in what schools teach in the way of spiritual and moral development. It is right that the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority committee was asked to look at that, but I also think that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby were right to say that its first report was a great disappointment.

I feel that there are three aspects of the matter: the spiritual side, the skills side—involving issues such as leadership and team spirit, as well as discipline itself—and the factual side. For there is a factual side. At least one school in my constituency is very proud of teaching children what are now rather scorned subjects, such as domestic science, which is extremely useful to the making of families.

Let us take the spiritual side first. Let me say without the slightest hesitation that, in my view, any attempt to teach morality without a religious basis is doomed to failure from the beginning. A recent speech that I heard on that subject was made by Lord Jakobovits—an excellent speech in the House of Lords. Let me, however, go back to an earlier century. Cardinal Newman summed it up when dealing with the issue of whether ethics could be taught without religion. He put it in a nutshell when he said:

"You can quarry a rock with razors or moor a vessel with a silken thread as readily as you can use mere logic to control the pride and passions of a man."

He was addressing an audience of male students, but what he said could equally be applied to young people of both sexes in their last years at school.

There is utter confusion. If people try to teach ethics without a religious base, what do they actually teach? Do they teach, for example, that all people have rights? At least one major world religion, the Hindu religion—a number of my relations were brought up in India—teaches that a whole class of people have no rights. Should people teach, for example, that homosexuality is on a par with marriage? Different philosophers disagree with that. Should they teach, for example, that marriage is a good thing?

That moves me from the spiritual side to the factual side. I think it right for children to be taught that marriage is the most successful way in which to rear children. They should be told about the huge body of evidence—most effectively assembled by a socialist, Professor Norman Dennis—that marriage is indeed the best way in which to rear children. A classroom may well contain children whose parents are not married, or who come from violent homes; it may well contain children like one of my closest friends, who was brought up with a deeply violent alcoholic father. That, however, should not stop us from trying to persuade the rising generation to do better than their parents.

I think that the factual side should extend further. In sex education, children should be taught the medical risks of homosexuality. They should be told how much shorter is the life expectancy of a homosexual than that of a member of the heterosexual community. We should not be ashamed to teach pupils the facts of life.

Besides the spiritual side, and the factual side, there is also the skills side. Certain basic skills are essential to being a citizen in this country. I mentioned discipline earlier; the Bill rightly says a lot about discipline, but let us remember self-discipline as well as collective discipline. I also believe that leadership is a skill that can be taught. It is taught partly through team games in which pupils work together, but also through other team activities, such as running the school debating society and editing the school magazine. Those are all ways of helping to develop leadership and other interactive skills.

We owe it to the rising generation to try to impart to them the traditional Christian values on which this country was founded—to teach them the traditional wisdom on which it was based, and to teach them the basic skills needed to develop the character which are so important to citizenship. I believe that both my right hon. Friends were absolutely right to say that SCAA has failed to address those issues, but we must address them. I welcome the fact that some clauses in the Bill say a little about them, but I shall press for more in other ways.

9.29 pm

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on his brilliant and lucid exposition of the constructive Labour policy for raising standards. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) on her excellent analysis of the reality of exclusion. The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) made his usual sound and sensible contribution and my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) and for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall) spoke about the arbitrariness of the 11-plus.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) underlined the difficulty about the planning of places under the Government's proposals and my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) spoke about the Bill's lack of choice for many. My hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) again spoke eloquently about the need for more regulation of agencies. I look forward to hearing the Minister on that, given his anti-regulation history. My hon. Friends the Members for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) brought their usual sagacity to the debate.

The Secretary of State repeated the tautology that somehow the introduction of selection enhances choice for parents, but we all know that schools select the children and that parents have no say in the matter. After some prompting by the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Sir D. Thompson), the right hon. Lady spoke about The Ridings school which, of course, is not her fault. She should try telling that to the leader of the Conservative group on Calder Valley council. He has made it abundantly clear that he holds the Secretary of State personally responsible for what happened in that school.

More interesting is the Secretary of State's position on caning in which she is aided and abetted by the hon. Members for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) and for Dartford (Mr. Dunn). It is bizarre that they should extol the virtues of corporal punishment. I give credit where it is due. The hon. Members for Mid–Kent (Mr. Rowe) and for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) take a somewhat different view, a more civilised view. It is more than ironic that the Secretary of State can tell the House that there will be a free vote on caning but not on handguns. That shows the kind of priorities that obtain in the Conservative party.

What can one say about the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold)? I have to say a little because he is sometimes referred to as the hon. Member for Transylvania, dealing in the education policies of the political undead. His promises and his commitments on education bear no relation to what is being offered by the Government. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) agrees with the Labour proposals that are set out in our document "Diversity and Excellence", for the inspection of LEAs by Ofsted. However, he took one of his usual right turns when he spoke about a dress code.

I taught in two schools in Australia which regularly turned out Rhodes scholars. We used to go to school in T-shirts and shorts and what are colloquially called thongs in Australia. We call them flip-flops. Our dress code certainly did not affect the academic excellence of those schools. There is no relationship whatever between the quality of education and how someone dresses.

My only advice to the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) is to speak to his archbishop about ecumenism.

We look in vain in the Bill for desirable measures. We look for a commitment to reduce class sizes to less than 30 and for the promotion of a general teaching council to enhance, develop and promote a noble profession. We also look in vain for guarantees to ensure that every 11-year-old without a special educational need reaches level 4 in national reading tests; for the removal of a taxpayers' subsidy to private schools; for unifying

[Mr. Peter Kilfoyle]

proposals to give parents true choice; and for the efficient planning of school places. I looked in vain for any mention of special educational needs.

Perhaps the House should look again at the parts of the Bill that I have not mentioned and on which there is some agreement. In April, my hon. Friend the Member for Brightside flagged up our proposals for school discipline. The Government are right to follow his example and look for a third option on exclusion. However, they have failed to adopt his whole package, which includes the holistic approach to the excluded child in pupil referral units with the appropriate diagnostic and remedial skills, working where possible towards the reintegration of the child in the mainstream school.

We are happy to welcome other Government proposals such as home-school contracts and base line assessment. We have proposed the former since 1988; the latter has been piloted by Labour authorities in Birmingham, Sheffield and Staffordshire. Both proposals were in our policy document "Excellence for Everyone". Furthermore, we are pleased that our plan for Ofsted has been adopted. We set the plan down in the policy paper "Diversity and Excellence".

Last but not least, Labour Members have clearly spelt out our commitment to careers education and guidance in the policy statement, "Lifelong Learning". The problem for the Government is one of credibility because nearly 800,000 16 to 25-year-olds are out of job, education and training networks. That is a clear indictment of the Government's long failure in the sector, as in many others.

All those capitulations to Labour policy initiatives are yet to be tested. I suspect that much of what appears to be non-contentious might yet be the subject of intense debate in Committee, not so much because of what is in the Bill, but because of what is not. There are, however, other proposals in the Bill that are divisive and damaging to education provision. They are more to do with desperate attempts by this discredited Government to win over a sceptical electorate to an education programme that would take us back to the future.

The Government's answer to the challenges of the 21st century is to resurrect failed policies that were condemned as such in the 1960s and in the 1970s, principally the idea of grammar schools and increased selection. The Association of Grant-Maintained and Aided Schools said in its submission that the White Paper "will produce a mish-mash." It also said that Government intentions on selection

"will distort the provision of school places . . . and lead to a diminution of choice for many parents, and unacceptably long journeys (with consequent expense). The Association urges you to think again".

Labour Members urge the Government to think again on much of the Bill.

Let us consider the notion of increasing the number of selective schools and the rate at which they select. Even in vanguard grant-maintained schools, there is no real constituency for increased selection, as the views of AGMAS show. Out of 1,100 GM schools, only 41 have sought an element of selection in their admissions criteria and only three have sought grammar school status.

Despite that evidence of what we might describe as underwhelming interest in selection, the Government insist on an annual consideration by schools of selective status. The Government have failed to recognise what has eventuated with their similar legislation, demanding that schools regularly consider grant-maintained status. The result of the latter misguided prescription is that ever fewer schools ballot on grant-maintained status, while, among those that do, an ever increasing number of ballots refuse grant-maintained status.

The lesson is simple, even for this dictatorial Government. People cannot, and will not, be forced down a sterile educational path. When one faces the united opposition of both teachers and parents, it is wise, even for a Government such as this, to reflect on the wisdom of going against the tide of both educational opinion and plain common sense. No one wants selection other than the right-wing ideologues of this doomed Conservative Government—that much is obvious.

The reasons for the opposition to those proposals is simple: selection has been tried before and found wanting for our children and for our national economic needs. We need all our children to be highly qualified, highly trained and highly skilled. The Bill does not cater for those wider needs. It will provide for a revived two-tier system, with neither the jobs for the people condemned to the lower education level proposed, nor the realisation of their potential, which the nation desperately needs.

As we have established, selection denies parental choice, making it less likely for many parents to send their child to their chosen neighbourhood school. The effect on children with special educational needs is especially pernicious. If their need involves intellectual impairment, selection exacerbates their sense of failure. If a child is able, but needs particular support—for example, a signer—in these days of ever tighter budgets and league table competition, that child may be discriminated against in a selective school ethos, contrary to the trend for more inclusive education for children with special educational needs.

Over many years, the Government have sought selection of one sort or another by the back door to undermine comprehensive education. We have had city technology colleges, grant-maintained schools and the odd grammar school. There are the scorched-earth policies of Tory Buckinghamshire, which bequeathed an unwanted grammar school and a £7 million debt to unitary Milton Keynes, in the face of community opposition.

This year, a Gallup poll showed 77 per cent. of people against selection, with only 19 per cent. in favour. Is it not peculiar that when a poll demonstrates support for corporal punishment Conservative Members are glad to trumpet the democratic wish of the people? When the democratic wish of the people is against selection, they ignore and ride roughshod over it. I give a simple challenge to the Government—if they want to implement the Prime Minister's pledge of a grammar school for every town, they should come clean and not play around the edges; they should tell the nation that it is their intention to return to the 11-plus for everyone. No one is fooled by the incremental steps to total selection. The Government should have the courage to place their plans before the people, before the election.

At the same time, the Government should clearly state their complete lack of interest in parental views on grant-maintained status. My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South referred to the comment by the right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon

(Mr. Patten), when he was Secretary of State for Education. He famously said that by 1996, most of the 3,900 maintained secondary schools, as well as a significant proportion of the 19,000 maintained primary schools, could be grant-maintained. As my hon. Friend also said, the right hon. Gentleman promised that he would eat his hat if he was wrong. He can eat his hat. I hope that it is a large hat to match his large orifice and his even larger ego because his commitment has not been fulfilled—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members are talking about playground jokes. The biggest playground joke is that they are not concerned about the educational needs of the vast majority of our children. The only thing in which they are interested is reflecting their own prejudice.

There are five locally managed secondary schools for every grant-maintained secondary school. In the primary sector, the ratio is 50:1. The policy has failed, but the Government still seem intent on switching the goalposts. Thus, the Bill removes the requirement for publication of statutory proposals on changes in the character of grant-maintained schools. In theory, they can expand or contract places without any reference to wider community needs. The Funding Agency for Schools, a Tory quango packed with Tory placemen, can determine new schools without reference to the local community—which will, however, have to pick up the bill. Local Tory cabals, in areas where they have no electoral legitimacy, will be able to ride roughshod over their communities and promote grant-maintained schools. What a repudiation of local democracy by this dreadful Government.

At the same time as the Government are waging ideological warfare on local schools, subsidies to the private sector will be extended via the assisted places scheme extension to primary schools in the independent sector. The only reason for that is an attempt to hogtie education finance for an incoming Labour Government. It has nothing to do with educational need. In fact, it completes the circle in the Government's justification for the assisted places scheme. They began by saying that the scheme was a subsidy to the former direct grant schools so that when they went independent they could keep their heads above water. Belatedly, it became a post-facto justification to say that the scheme took children from working-class families—in theory, 33,000—and gave them an advantaged education. Now, the Government are back to the original, very obvious, reason for the scheme—to provide a subsidy for, in this case, independent schools in the primary sector.

Much of the Bill fails abysmally, yet again, to deal with the education priorities apparent to all except Conservative Members, who seem intent on saving their own skins—especially those on the Front Bench—in their internal party battle after their impending election defeat. Each of them wishes to establish his ever more right-wing credentials.

We need a general election so that the people can voice their opinion on the real educational needs of the nation. Governments—like people—experience growth, adulthood, decrepitude and decay. In this case, the Government should go none too gently into their own good night. I urge the House to vote in favour of the official Opposition's amendment and motion.

9.44 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): After studying the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), I can assume only that moustaches have been disappearing on the Opposition Front Bench so that contributions could be made to the Sedgefield replacement hair fund.

This debate will be remembered—if it is remembered at all—as the do-as-I-say-and-not-as-I-do debate. If anything, that attitude has been the consistent theme expressed by Opposition Members. I listened to the speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), and heard him say at an early stage in it that he wanted to take us down memory lane. He frequently mentioned the phrase "17 years".

Mr. Blunkett: I said 18 years.

Mr. Forth: Taking my cue from the hon. Gentleman, I should like to go back only 15 years—to Sheffield, the House will not be surprised to hear. I have been informed that, when the hon. Gentleman played a prominent part in Sheffield politics, he was instrumental in preventing schools from insisting on school uniforms. I assume that that will give us some clue to the background of the matter. Not content with that, he voted for the abolition of sixth forms at all secondary schools in Sheffield. His legacy remains even now, however, because Sheffield's funding formula provides for the lowest funding for sixth form pupils in the country. Sheffield also has a much lower staying-on rate for pupils at 16 than almost any other area in the country.

Mr. Blunkett: Other than mistakes on statistics and dates, perhaps the Minister will tell us what are the statistics for staying-on rates in Sheffield and in equivalent authorities, just so that we have it on the record.

Sir Jim Spicer (West Dorset): Go back 15 years.

Mr. Blunkett: I am not talking about 15 years ago; I am talking about 1996.

Mr. Forth: The figure is 57 per cent. for Sheffield, compared with 61 per cent. in Yorkshire and in Humberside and 68 per cent. in the United Kingdom as a whole. Perhaps that explains why, earlier this year—I shall deal now with the present day, having briefly gone down that memory lane—head teachers of secondary schools in Sheffield said:

> "We no longer have any confidence in the processes which the council adopts in relation to its funding of schools. This lack of confidence applies to every stage in the process: to the leadership, to planning and to the allocation and delivery of funding."

I made that point because there has been one consistent theme in this debate: Opposition Members seeking to blame the Government for what they consider to be shortfalls in our performance on education. As we know, the reality is that the Government do not run schools; local education authorities run schools. When we examine the real evidence of what is happening in our schools—in the classroom—it becomes apparent that it is schools run by Labour-controlled authorities that consistently fail their pupils. That is the reality.

[Mr. Forth]

We can consider the situation in places other than Sheffield, however, because I do not want to restrict our attentions to that city. As we know, Labour in action has another face: the element of parental choice. I shall not repeat the list that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave earlier, but I emphasise that we do not condemn the exercise of parental choice by Opposition Members. We welcome the fact that they exercise their parental choice to send their children to schools that they regard as superior to those provided by their authorities. I do not condemn that, but it is noticeable that Opposition Members have condemned their own colleagues.

The hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) resigned as chairman of Labour's parliamentary education committee, saying that he could not stand the hypocrisy of what some of his colleagues had done. The hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) described his colleagues' choice of schools for their children as a major error of judgment. The inimitable hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks) said:

> "If senior Labour politicians are sending their children outside their local education authority areas, people will say local schools are simply not good enough for their children."

I suspect that people in Islington and Southwark are saying that. Opposition Members and parents are saying that the standards and quality of schools provided by Labour-run local education authorities are unacceptable.

Mr. Blunkett: Will the Minister tell the House how many of the Cabinet have sent their children to—*[Interruption.]* They certainly don't like it up 'em. How many of the Cabinet have sent their children to state schools of any description?

Mr. Forth: It shows how desperate the hon. Gentleman is that he has to dredge up that old favourite. Conservative Members do not condemn the independent sector; they do not condemn selective schools; they do not condemn grant-maintained schools. Opposition Members, including the hon. Gentleman's colleagues, condemn all those schools, but they send their children to them.

I looked at the list of local education authorities in order of the numbers of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A to C. The House will not be surprised to learn that, of the 16 poorest performing authorities, 15 are Labour-controlled. I mention that because it has been depressing throughout the debate to hear Opposition Members assuming that, if there are selective and non-selective schools alongside each other, we can write off the non-selective schools because, according to Opposition Members, they will be educationally hopeless and unacceptable. Opposition Members always assume that because they have no expectations of schools located in what they regard as written-off social areas.

Conservative Members, such as my hon. Friends the Members for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), for Dover (Mr. Shaw) and for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier)—as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett), who cannot contribute because of his Trappist vow as a parliamentary private secretary—are proud to point out a different phenomenon: that, in their areas, they have a combination of selective and non-selective schools that are all good in different ways. Opposition Members miss that point because they are stuck—blinkered—with the idea that any non-selective school near to a selective school is automatically written off and condemned as useless. By implication, they have lost all educational interest in such schools.

Conservative Members recognise that we can have good selective schools and equally good, but different, non-selective schools. We can have schools specialising in different subject areas, city technology colleges, Church schools, grant-maintained schools and independent schools, which pupils from less well-off homes can attend thanks to the assisted places scheme. That is diversity in action—the real choice that we are offering parents.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Was Lady Thatcher wrong to have closed so many grammar schools when she was Secretary of State for Education?

Mr. Forth: I find it difficult to imagine Lady Thatcher being wrong about anything.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) made an excellent point. With his expertise and usual accuracy he said that selective schools can have a beneficial and positive influence on the primary sector by encouraging it to raise its standards. We know that secondary school heads often say that the product of primary schools in their catchment area leaves much to be desired. That is something that we can put right with provisions included in the Bill such as target setting for self-improvement by schools and base line assessment of pupils in order the better to measure performance by schools as pupils go through their vital early years.

It struck me as breathtaking that Opposition Members today managed to claim authorship of the Bill's provisions and, indeed, of many of the improvements that have taken place in education in the past few years. However much they may want to deny it now, the reality is that the Opposition have systematically opposed every step that we have taken to improve education. For example, they opposed the Education Act 1994 which established the Teacher Training Agency specifically to improve initial teacher training. They also opposed the Education Act 1993 which established the Funding Agency for Schools. I well remember Opposition Members predicting "chaos and confusion" in the setting up of that agency, but nothing of the kind happened—that was simply the Opposition's usual pessimism and negativity.

Incidentally, as the hon. Member for Walton mentioned pupils with special educational needs, he may recall—or he may not—that one of the key elements of the 1993 Act was the special educational needs code of practice, something in which I take pride as I was connected with it. I do not believe that there is a case for further legislation on special educational needs. I am not saying that we have had the last word on it, but it was not necessary to include further related provisions in the Bill. I could go even further back, but I think that the point is made.

Several of my hon. Friends, especially my hon. Friends the Members for Croydon, North–East (Mr. Congdon) and for Rugby and Kenilworth, mentioned discipline. We asked teachers and their representatives what they wanted and what would assist them in implementing discipline in

their schools. The Bill gives them what they asked for, a fact that I recently verified with a number of teacher organisations. They have told me that they are satisfied with the measures in the Bill. I therefore believe that the Bill is soundly based in terms of its disciplinary measures, which the teacher organisations endorse. Whether my hon. Friends wish to take the matter further is entirely up to them. They will make their case, but I rest on what is in the Bill and the fact that teachers support it.

Mr. Kilfoyle *rose—*

Mr. Forth: I am sorry; I shall not give way as I want to say a word about the important contribution of the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor). She mentioned excluded pupils, as did some of my hon. Friends. I agree with her that pupils who are excluded from school deserve more attention than any others. They are more in need than any others and we have to do everything possible to deal with them supportively. That is why the 1993 Act placed a duty on local education authorities to make proper provision for them and why the Bill places such emphasis on LEAs having proper policies to deal with pupils with behavioural difficulties and on the inspection of LEAs and other measures which I believe will positively help pupils with such difficulties. I hope that the hon. Lady will acknowledge that fact.

The Bill carries forward the important work that we have done in all the education legislation passed in the 1980s. I am disappointed but not surprised that Opposition Members are going to oppose the Bill just as they have opposed every other step that we have taken to improve standards. We act to provide the framework for improved standards in education. We defy Labour-controlled local education authorities to continue letting down generations of pupils as they have for an unacceptably long time. We accept our responsibility properly and effectively to improve education, and I invite the House to support the Bill.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 257, Noes 285.

Division No. 10] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joseph
Austin–Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, A J
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Miss Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'd)*
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'd Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles

Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Short, Ms Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Clarke and
Mr. Kevin Hughes.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Sir James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riffkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard

Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Bowen Wells.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading), and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Bill be committed to a Special Standing Committee.—[*Mr. Blunkett.*]

The House divided: Ayes 257, Noes 284.

Division No. 11] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, A J
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Miss Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'd)*
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Orme, Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Short, Ms Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*

Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Sir David
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Clarke and
Mr. Kevin Hughes.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Sir James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riffkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*

Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Bowen Wells.

Question accordingly negatived.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

EDUCATION BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Education Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any sums required by the Secretary of State for the payment of grants under the Act;

(b) any administrative expenses incurred by the Secretary of State in consequence of the Act; and

(c) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under any other Act.—*[Mr. Anthony Coombs.]*

Question agreed to.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Ordered,

That Mr. Phil Gallie and Dr. Ian Twinn be appointed to the Public Accounts Commission in place of Sir Peter Hordern and Sir Thomas Arnold, under the National Audit Act 1983.—*[Mr. Anthony Coombs.]*

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ordered,

That Ms Angela Eagle be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Anthony Coombs.]*

EUROPEAN LEGISLATION

Ordered,

That Mr. Kevin Hughes be discharged from the Select Committee on European Legislation and Mr. John McAllion be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Anthony Coombs.]*

NORTHERN IRELAND AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Mr. Thomas McAvoy be discharged from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee and Dr. Norman A. Godman be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

TREASURY

Ordered,

That Mr. Clive Betts be discharged from the Treasury Committee and Mr. Ian Pearson be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

Dentists (Scotland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Anthony Coombs.]*

10.28 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I thank Madam Speaker for giving me the opportunity to raise my constituents' concerns in an Adjournment debate. My involvement in the affair began when two of my constituents asked for my help. They had attended a local dentist by the name of William Duff. They had been given treatments that were both unnecessary and grossly unsatisfactory, creating long-term dental problems and the necessity for substantial remedial work. They had complained to Greater Glasgow health board.

It took months for those cases to be heard while Mr. Duff gave endless reasons not to turn up for the inquiries. In a third case, my constituent did not even receive a response when she wrote on two occasions to the Department of Practitioner Services. Finally, Greater Glasgow health board was faced with an authoritative professional opinion to the effect that my constituents' complaints were more than justified. Indeed, the consultant's professional opinion showed that there was far more cause for concern than had been realised.

Far from responding helpfully and putting matters right, the health board has rejected my constituents' claims on bureaucratic grounds, expecting them to provide evidence that they do not have and cannot reasonably be expected to have. So far, the Scottish Office has not responded any more helpfully, although I gather that legal advice is being sought by the Department in some cases.

At first, I thought that those were fairly routine matters and the regular experience of Members dealing with a constituent's complaint of unfairness by an authority. I now know that, far from my constituents' distress being isolated incidents, a man's career was well known over a number of years to Greater Glasgow health board.

At its meeting on 21 September 1993, the board agreed that the inclusion of Mr. Duff in the list of dental practitioners would be prejudicial to the efficiency of the provision of general dental services. The board's legal advisers submitted representations to a tribunal on 11 January 1994. It was not until February this year that the tribunal directed that Mr. Duff should be struck off every health board list in the country after a Greater Glasgow health board committee found him in breach of his terms of service, much too late to protect who knows how many unwitting patients from this man's greed.

It was greed that lay at the bottom of the matter. Mr. Duff is a fully qualified dentist. The fact that he has been removed from health board lists does not prevent him from working in private practice. Many people, seeking a dentist, might imagine that in paying a private sector dentist they were buying a superior service, but in Mr. Duff's case at least they would be extremely misguided.

As the excellent "World in Action" programme recently pointed out, people think of bacteria as the enemy, not their dentist. Most of the time, of course, they are right. If it had not been for the evidence given to the patients by Mr. McCrossan, who examined their mouths at the dental hospital, and given to me by another dentist, a highly experienced one who teaches postgraduate students, I would not have realised how great was the magnitude of Mr. Duff's wrongdoing and how badly certain patients had been let down by the health board.

I shall give the House an idea of how bad some individual cases have been. Angela Mulhern had work carried out by Mr. Duff in 1993-94. She is now a constituent of the Minister with responsibilities for health. Having no previous history of dental trouble, she now is unable to work regularly, and has had to give up her job and her home. The health board refused to investigate her complaint because she cannot give the specific dates of her treatment. But Mr. Duff has removed her records from the practice. Her treatment has never been completed, so the time bar rule should not apply. She is being told that it does. Mr. McCrossan said of her treatment:

"I know of no pattern of dental disease which attacks the posterior teeth so severely, yet leaves the anterior teeth unaffected . . . Not all of the treatment was clinically necessary—generally the quality of the treatment is well below the level I would expect from a competent dental practitioner . . . Miss Mulhern had no pain before treatment, but has never been free from pain since."

I have been pursuing the cases of Moann Russell and Nicola O'Neill for two years with Greater Glasgow health board and the Scottish Office. In Moann's case, the consultant, Mr. McCrossan, wrote:

"I must question whether the original dentistry was required . . . I am appalled by the dismally poor quality of the work . . . It is a tribute to nature that she had no acute symptoms at the time of her visit to me."

In addition, the dental service committee found in May 1995 that the treatment claimed for on the GP17 forms did not match that recorded on the patient's dental record card.

In Nicola's case, Mr. McCrossan wrote:

"Apart from the treated teeth Nicola's mouth is in excellent condition. This sort of treatment plan I would have expected in a badly neglected mouth . . . Our problem now is to attempt to repair the damage that has been done".

Nicola was under age to give her own consent when treatment began with Mr. Duff. The form is signed by one Susan McEwing, a person not known to Nicola.

Mairi Patrick's case became known to me only recently. Mr. McCrossan commented:

"the vast majority of the work is of poor quality, far below what I would expect".

The health board has refused to pay for re-treatment because her complaint was made later than the 13-week limit.

Mr. Duff first came to attention in 1987, when he was fired by the dentist who employed him at that time. His treatments of at least 10 patients were set out in a damning report to Ayrshire and Arran health board, but it had no responsibility to tell anyone else.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): Earlier tonight, after my hon. Friend had some publicity about her Adjournment debate, I received a telephone call from Nicholas Gilmour, who, in 1987, was a constituent of mine and attended the same dental practice as I do in Johnstone, where I have had nothing but excellent treatment. He tells me that William Duff worked in that practice in Johnstone and that he was given three crowns, two of which were unnecessary. He had to undergo very painful operations. In 1987, Argyll and Clyde health

board was involved. Mr. Gilmour was taken to the Scottish Office home and health department to be examined. I wonder why nothing was done then, in 1987.

Mrs. Fyfe: My hon. Friend raises an important point. It shows that three health boards have had experience of that dentist, yet because there is no obligation to transfer information, that kind of thing can go on and on until it is finally stopped. Like my hon. Friend, I wonder what happened on that occasion.

After the experience with Ayrshire and Arran health board, Mr. Duff moved to Maryhill. About 20 of his cases were subsequently referred to Greater Glasgow health board for action by the regional dental officer. Some of his patients had been treated with a substance called endomethesone, which contains a steroid and a mummifying agent. The latter's effects wear off up to two years later. It hid the continuing presence of infection in the patients' teeth, which flared up later. Mr. Duff was using it as a quick fix, because careful treatment to remove all the infection took more time, and time was money to him. There was no way a patient could know that, which is reason enough for the time limits on hearing complaints from patients to be reviewed once again, as even the recent reform would not necessarily take account of that.

In one year, Mr. Duff received £450,000 from the national health service, and more than £1 million in two and a half years. Average gross income per annum is £90,000, which, after deduction of expenses, leaves a dentist with an average income of £37,000. Mr. Duff was always at the top by far in the Scottish league table of dentists' incomes from 1992 to 1994. Very reasonable suspicion of Mr. Duff's care and attention of his patients was naturally aroused in the profession. Those people knew that he could not be making that money and taking the care required. Questions arose about the possibility of false claims for work that had never been done.

Mr. Duff made a practice of getting patients to sign the form authorising treatment at the start of treatment, and in at least some cases that I know of, they did not sign at the end. When one member of the health board—a member of the Scottish Dental Practice Board—raised that matter, one might think that surely Duff's number would be up. But no. That person's repeated threats of resignation from the health board fell on deaf ears, because the lay members of the board—that quango appointed by the Secretary of State—supported Duff. Their attitude, apparently, was that his high earnings showed that he must be a good business man and that his production line was more efficient than the rest. One might say that the whole affair gives a new meaning to the saying, "No gain without pain." Mr. Duff's gain meant other people's pain.

This is not a completely isolated case. There are fears among those who care about quality in the NHS that Mr. Duff, whose story is well known to dentistry students in Scotland, might have influenced a number of younger dentists to try to get away with it. In 10 years he has made enough to buy a house worth £220,000, in Kilbarchan, and a BMW estate and a Land Rover Discovery, both with personalised number plates.

My complaint is not that there are rich pickings for the unscrupulous, nor is it a complaint about dentistry in general. Thankfully, most of us can and do trust our dentists. First, I want the Minister to deal with the failure of Greater Glasgow health board to respond with the flexibility that it had at its disposal—even under the old complaints system that existed before April 1996—to make amends to my constituents and to ensure that they receive the most appropriate treatment, where possible, without the expense that they cannot afford.

I agree with the British Dental Association that it is much better for a patient's complaint to be resolved as soon as possible. It is time that our system ensured that.

Secondly, it is necessary to review the monitoring system to ensure that standards are upheld, and that the NHS is not paying either for non-existent or shoddy work. The Scottish Dental Practice Board should notice if a dentist has an unusual prescribing pattern, and should be able to insist on cases being heard by the health board without delay, but at present no such safeguard exists.

Thirdly, Mr. Duff's patients have consistently had to refute misrepresentations of the facts, and have had endlessly to deal with the fact that their evidence has been officially ignored. I therefore want an independent investigation of each complaint that has been raised against Mr. Duff.

There is much more to tell, but time does not permit it. Incompetence was not the reason for his patients' sufferings: Mr. Duff is a fully qualified dentist. The reason was his determination to get as much cash as he could out of the NHS.

The NHS was brought into being 50 years ago to help people gain a standard of health that poverty had historically denied most of them. It is unacceptable that patients today are denied justice, because they cannot afford either court action or the cost of re-treatment when a practitioner has betrayed their trust. I trust that the Minister will be minded to respond in full to those requests.

10.41 pm

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) on raising some important matters and begin by making the obvious point that if the General Dental Council erases the name of a dentist from its register, that dentist cannot practise. Practising in those circumstances would be a criminal offence.

I should also mention that 50 to 80 per cent. of the gross earnings of many dentists relate to expenses. That may be the case with this individual.

The hon. Lady has asked me to look into various matters. Tomorrow, I shall study what she has said in great detail, because some of the matters are complex. I shall try to give a full explanation of what has happened and why, and of what is likely to happen in the future.

Happily, the occasions on which such complaints are made are few. The great majority of dentists are committed to their profession and to using their skills for the benefit of their patients. That is why it is important that there should be robust procedures to deal with dentists who fail to provide care to the high standards of skill and probity that we rightly expect.

The Scottish Office recognised that the previous procedures were unsatisfactory in a number of respects, and the hon. Lady has described some of them. We therefore instituted a review of the NHS complaints

[Lord James Douglas–Hamilton]

procedures by a committee chaired by Professor Alan Wilson. The Wilson committee reported in May 1994, and recommended radical change, the most fundamental of which was the principle that the consideration of complaints should be separate from the handling of discipline. New arrangements based on the Wilson committee's recommendations were introduced in April 1996. I shall return to them later.

The events relating to the concerns expressed by the hon. Lady took place during 1993-94. It is a basic principle of our system that changes do not apply retrospectively. The handling of complaints about Mr. Duff must, therefore, be governed by the regulations in force at that time.

I have every sympathy with the hon. Lady's constituents. Indeed, as she mentioned, one of my constituents has also complained about Mr. Duff, so I know that it has been a very distressing experience, but the regulations in force at the time cannot be ignored.

I shall explain the regulations. Until 1 April of this year, complaints and questions of discipline about dentists and other family health service practitioners who provide treatment under the NHS were dealt with under the same system. It involved referral to statutory service committees where appropriate and, in the most serious cases, referral to an NHS tribunal.

The rules governing the time scale within which complaints had to be made were laid out in the NHS (Service Committees and Tribunal) (Scotland) Regulations 1992, which state that a complaint must be made within six months of the end of the treatment that gave rise to the complaint, or within 13 weeks of the cause for complaint becoming known to the complainer, whichever was the sooner.

Any complaint made more than six months after the date on which treatment ended was, by virtue of that fact, a late complaint, and for a late complaint to be investigated by a service committee the patient had to show, for each and every day, that there was good reason for the delay in submitting the complaint. The onus was on the patient to show that he or she could not have known earlier that there was cause for complaint, and that they made the complaint immediately they were so aware unless they could show good reason, such as bereavement or illness, for each day they delayed further.

It was, of course, open to patients to appeal to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland against a health board decision to dismiss a complaint on grounds of lateness. In such cases, the Secretary of State is precluded from considering the merits of the complaint. The only question that he can address is whether the lateness of the complaint was justified.

I have dwelt on those points in some detail because many of the issues that the hon. Lady has raised revolve around the question of lateness. In particular, she accused Greater Glasgow health board of inflexibility in its handling of cases relating to Mr. Duff. As I have explained, the health board must apply the regulations as they stood at the time, and they do not allow for much latitude.

I shall now deal with the question of complaints against Mr. Duff. I understand from Greater Glasgow health board that it received many complaints about Mr. Duff from patients during 1993.

Mrs. Fyfe: If the Minister will undertake to examine closely the cases to which I have referred, he will see that they are not generally time-barred because of individual circumstances. I did not have time to explain earlier, but if he studies the cases I think he will find that they should have been considered and have been wrongly rejected.

Lord James Douglas–Hamilton: I will study what the hon. Lady has said very closely, but I must operate according to the same criteria for all constituents, regardless of the constituency from which they come. Whether a case is time-barred is a matter of legal interpretation, and I must follow the best advice that the Scottish Office lawyers give as objectively as possible. I will study what the hon. Lady has said very closely, but I act on the basis of the best information that we now have available. I shall deal with each case individually because, as the hon. Lady will appreciate, there are many cases of this kind.

The volume of complaints of a potentially serious nature was such that the board took the step of referring Mr. Duff directly to an NHS tribunal on 11 January 1994. The case was protracted, both because of the volume of evidence and because the proceedings were adjourned for a time when Mr. Duff was unwell. Mr. Duff ceased to practise in the summer of 1994. The tribunal, under the chairmanship of Mr. W. C. Galbraith QC, issued its report in February this year. It found that Mr. Duff had been in breach of his terms of service on many counts, and directed that his name be removed from the dental list of the health board. It also directed that Mr. Duff's name should not be included in the list of any other board.

I understand that, in addition to the cases that were covered by the tribunal, 18 subsequent complaints were looked into by Greater Glasgow health board's dental service committee. In 15 cases the complaint was late and against the criteria that I have explained this evening. The health board decided, on the ground of lateness, that those cases should not be investigated. In five of those cases, an appeal was made to the Secretary of State. One is awaiting determination, three have been dismissed, and one case was allowed. Three were dismissed because grounds for lateness were inadequate and did not meet the criteria. The one case that was allowed is now being investigated by Greater Glasgow health board. I have again gone into some detail because it is important to realise that these cases are complex. Each has to be considered on its merits and the outcome of each can be different, depending on the individual circumstances.

In three cases that were in time, the service committee held that the complaints had been made timeously, and these cases include those of the hon. Lady's constituents. In both cases the health board decided, on the recommendation of the dental service committee, that Mr. Duff was in breach of his terms of service on some counts but not on others. The complainants have appealed against the findings adverse to them, and Mr. Duff has done likewise. Appeals in these hybrid cases are complex and, as I have explained, they must be considered in terms of the regulations in force at the time.

I regret that the appeals by the hon. Lady's two constituents, Miss O'Neill and Mrs. Russell, have not yet been determined. Appeals are dealt with as far as possible in the order in which they are submitted. The efforts required to put in place the new system for patient complaints and practitioner discipline meant that resources had to be diverted and, unfortunately, a backlog of appeal cases arose. Since the summer, that backlog has been substantially reduced. The cases in question are now being looked at urgently, and decisions will be taken shortly. The House will appreciate that I cannot give any indication now of the likely outcome, but I undertake to inform the hon. Lady as soon as decisions are made.

Mr. McMaster: My request is simple. The Minister has undertaken to look in detail at the cases in Greater Glasgow health board. Will he also look at the case of Nicholas Gilmour in Argyll and Clyde health board and at cases in Ayrshire and Arran health board?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes, and I shall write to the hon. Gentleman in due course. I will not give a snap answer.

The hon. Lady has raised concerns about the freedom of dentists to continue to practise in the NHS while they are under investigation by a tribunal, and about their ability after disqualification to practise as assistants or deputies. I can reassure her on both counts. First, since Mr. Duff's failings came to light, the powers of the tribunal have been extended. By virtue of the National Health Service (Amendment) Act 1995, the tribunal has power to suspend a practitioner, if that is necessary for the protection of patients, pending full consideration of the case.

Secondly, removal from the dental list means that Mr. Duff may not practise in the NHS as a principal or as an associate. All health boards and trusts in Scotland have been notified of the disqualification. The disqualification applies throughout the United Kingdom and other health departments have been informed. In addition, regulations require that he may be employed as a deputy or assistant only with the consent of the Secretary of State. There have been no such applications on behalf of Mr. Duff, and he is not allowed to practise in the NHS.

In terms of practising outside the NHS, decisions about a dentist's fitness to practise are matters for the General Dental Council. The tribunal's findings have been reported to it and I understand that it will consider them shortly. Whether Mr. Duff's certificate to practise should be withdrawn altogether is a matter for the General Dental Council. It has the power to erase a dentist's name, which means that the dentist cannot practise and, if he does, he commits a criminal offence.

Mrs. Fyfe: As it is clear that knowledge of this dentist's conduct became known to at least one health board as early as 1987, will the Minister undertake to look at how it is possible for patients to go on having such mistreatment before matters are resolved? I hope he will agree that this has taken far too long to reach a conclusion.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have made inquiries as to why it took so long. The only thing that I can say is that it is always easier to view events more clearly with hindsight. The board did not receive complaints from patients until late 1993. Concerns before that were about possible irregularities in payment claims and the board conducted a detailed six-month investigation early in 1993. That, coupled with complaints from patients, convinced the board that the position was sufficiently serious to warrant direct referral to an NHS tribunal, which was done in January 1994. I have no doubt that there are lessons to be learnt after episodes of this nature and I will ensure that the hon. Lady's remarks are forwarded to Greater Glasgow health board.

As I have said, since these unfortunate events, the Scottish Office has acted to introduce a new NHS complaints procedure. The purpose is to provide a simple, flexible, impartial and easily accessible system for the public, as well as being fair to NHS practitioners and staff. Local resolution is the key to the success of the new procedure. The provider of the service—the NHS trust, GP practice, dentist, pharmacist or optician—will respond to the complaint and try to provide an answer that satisfies the complainant. That will be speedy and informal.

If the complainant is still dissatisfied, a non-executive director of a trust or health board, called a convenor, will review the complaint in consultation with an independent lay person. The convenor may decide to ask the provider to make a further attempt to resolve the complaint, perhaps through conciliation, to set up an independent review panel to consider the complaint, or to inform the complainant that everything that could reasonably have been done has been done to resolve the complaint. Panels will have an independent lay chairman and a majority of members completely independent of the service provider. The panel will be advised on clinical matters by independent clinical assessors.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the response from that process, there is recourse to the health service commissioner, whose powers have been extended by virtue of the Health Service Commissioners Act 1993 so that he can consider clinical complaints, complaints against primary care services practitioners, and complaints about services provided in the independent sector of the NHS. The new system will support the commitment of professionals and staff to achieve a high quality of service.

To ensure that the new system is operating efficiently and effectively, guidance has been issued to all health boards, NHS trusts and primary care services. Training programmes that are supported by extensive, centrally prepared material are in hand in all trusts and health boards for front-line staff, convenors and lay members as appropriate. Health boards have reported that training seminars have been organised for primary care practitioners, as well as for their own staff.

Although health boards have been asked to be flexible when considering complaints made outwith time limits, they are expected to maintain a balance of fairness between complainant and practitioner. Where it is suspected that the events in question amount to a breach of the terms of service, a health board must refer the matter for investigation within 28 days. If a matter comes to the attention of a health board other than as a result of a complaint, action must be taken within 13 weeks. In certain cases concerning dentists, the period is six months, as before. Late referrals cannot proceed. Those provisions are simpler and fairer.

[Lord James Douglas–Hamilton]

There have been amendments to the Dentists Act 1984. The General Dental Council is the regulatory body for the dental profession and is charged, under the Act, with promoting high standards. They include a requirement for dentists to undertake annual continuing professional education and a proposal to establish a statutory career redevelopment scheme for dentists operating within and outwith the NHS who are identified as requiring to improve their competence. The council also proposes that, where there is a finding of serious professional misconduct, its professional conduct committee should impose conditions on a dentist's registration as an additional disciplinary sanction to those in place. That can involve erasure or suspension. Erasure means that he cannot practise at all.

I hope that I have managed to allay some—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at two minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 12 November 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON BILL *[Lords]*

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Promoters of the King's College London Bill *[Lords]* may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with:

That if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session:

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read) and shall be ordered to be read the third time;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during any previous Session.—[*The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Tuesday 19 November.

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

Jobseeker's Allowance

1. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance. [1697]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): The jobseeker's allowance is now in operation and will achieve its objectives by helping people back to work and securing better value for money for the taxpayer.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that the introduction of the JSA is absolute proof that the Government are determined to devote the necessary resources to getting people back to work and preventing fraudulent claims? Is that not in total contrast to the Opposition, who are pledged to repeal the JSA?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend makes two powerful points. The hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) is on the record as saying that it is Labour party policy to repeal the JSA. That would cost £240 million in 1997-98. Let us hear what the Opposition now say.

Mr. McNamara: The Under-Secretary will be aware that the experiment took place in Hull. Will he be kind enough to tell the House how many people are now in full-time employment as a result of the experiment, and of those who had placements, how many had placements in private industry, as distinct from community employment?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman is referring to the current project work pilots which have been tried out in several areas, including Kingston upon Hull, as he mentioned. With respect to the three pilots in Hull, Medway and Maidstone, it is striking that more than 4,000 people joined the pilots, more than 1,200 have been through the first 13 weeks of intensive help, 263 have been placed directly into a job during their first 13 weeks, and 68 during their period of work experience. It is, however, startling that about one third of those referred for work experience failed to turn up for their first day of work experience.

Sir Donald Thompson: My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that I have spoken about the new scheme to people who work in jobcentres in my constituency. Will he give careful consideration to letters that come from all parts of the House as the new scheme is introduced, and accelerate his response to those letters, as there are likely to be administrative hitches that will need sorting out if this excellent scheme is to gain approbation?

Mr. Evans: The jobseeker's allowance is an enormous project, involving more than 30,000 officials and a new computer system. We are closely monitoring the project as it comes into operation, and will carefully attend to administrative problems, whether we are alerted to them by hon. Members or others.

Incapacity Benefit

2. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he has taken to monitor the impact of the all-work test for incapacity benefit on the incomes of disabled people. [1698]

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Alistair Burt): The all-work test is designed to focus benefit on those who cannot work because of sickness or disability. Its impact on the income of disabled people will depend on individual circumstances. As with all new benefits, we are monitoring the effect of the changes on all groups.

Mr. Sutcliffe: Will the Minister accept that there is widespread concern that the test is inappropriate and inconsistent? That is borne out by the number of successful appeals against it—there has been a 50 per cent. success rate on appeals. What does his Department intend to do about the 50,000 people who previously could accept invalidity benefit but now cannot get it? What will be done to track those people, to ensure that their circumstances do not worsen?

Mr. Burt: There are two points to be made. First, the success rate on appeals is about the same as it was for

the old social security appeals tribunals. Secondly, we are monitoring the way in which the test is being applied. A major study has been done on its consistency and we expect to publish that soon. I hope that that will help the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend confirm that spending on the disabled has more than trebled in real terms since 1979? Will he accept also that many people find it paradoxical that, although the health of the nation has improved, the number of those receiving disability benefit has gone through the roof?

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend is right: spending on benefits for the disabled has almost quadrupled during our time in office. We introduced incapacity benefit to deal with the problem of a doubling in the number of people on invalidity benefit in the past 10 years when, as my hon. Friend said, the "Health of the Nation" shows that people are fitter.

Benefit Fraud

3. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to tackle organised benefit fraud. [1700]

4. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent review he has made of measures to ensure the reduction of benefit fraud. [1701]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): The Government have introduced a comprehensive strategy to prevent, deter and detect benefit fraud—especially organised fraud. Nearly 300 officers are employed in tackling organised fraud. I recently introduced the fraud hotline and the fraud Bill will be introduced shortly.

Ms Eagle: After 17 years of this Government's stewardship of the social security system, is it not a disgrace that £2 billion is lost yearly through housing benefit fraud? Why do the Government not give local authorities more power to check that landlords are bona fide and are entitled to the money that they claim?

Mr. Lilley: It is extraordinary that the hon. Lady refers to the one type of fraud that local authorities are responsible for pursuing. It will not have escaped her notice that most local authorities are controlled by the Labour party. They took very little, if any, serious interest in the matter until I introduced incentives and penalties to force them to do so—and, even then, the response was not sufficient. That is why I am introducing in this Session the fraud Bill, which will establish an inspectorate of local authorities and give me the powers to galvanise local authorities into action.

Mr. Rathbone: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on what he has done, and is planning to do, to solve the problems caused by increasing numbers of people working the system, either through sophisticated gangs or systematic individual fraud. Will he consider taking further steps to move from the present unsatisfactory method of using the national insurance number as the basis for social security payments to something more sophisticated?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support for our actions. I believe that the national insurance number is a sound basis for the administration of social security. We shall introduce measures in the fraud Bill to make it an offence to seek to secure a national insurance number falsely, even if it has not yet been used to abuse the system.

Mr. Frank Field: How seriously should the House regard the Government's hotline approach to fraud? Is it not true that 90 per cent. of calls to the hotline cannot be followed up, largely because most of those who answer the telephones are untrained, temporary staff? When will the Government implement a serious programme to tackle fraud and be as serious as the Opposition in seeking to protect taxpayers' money?

Mr. Lilley: Very unusually for the hon. Gentleman—who is normally well informed—his allegations are not correct. The benefit fraud hotline has so far received more than 100,000 calls, a significant number of which are proving successful.

Mr. Field: How can the Secretary of State say that?

Mr. Lilley: It takes time to follow them up. The quality of information is extremely good. In some cases, the calls refer to the same individual as he or she is well known in a locality for committing fraud and abusing the system. The staff use a systematic procedure to extract information from callers which is proving successful not just in extracting good information but in weeding out the small number of malicious calls that may concern some Opposition Members. The hotline has proved a great success and I am astonished that Labour Members should attack and criticise it.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that, last year, his Department saved £1.4 billion as a result of anti-fraud measures? Is he aware that fraud against the taxpayer enrages my constituents, which is why they are delighted that he is taking steps to deal with it?

Mr. Lilley: I can certainly confirm the point that my hon. Friend makes: that the savings last year through fraud detected and stopped amounted to nearly £1.5 billion. He is also right to say that the people who resent fraud most are the vast majority of honest claimants and decent working people, who resent seeing other people ripping off the system and ending up nearly as well off as they are but not doing a full day's work.

Mr. McLeish: Will the Secretary of State explain why he is unwilling to crack down on the scandal of organised landlord fraud in housing benefit? Is it because private landlords have an opt-out from Tory fraud scrutiny? Is he aware that, in real terms, housing benefit has doubled in a decade from £5.2 billion to £11.1 billion, and that in the private rented sector it has trebled over the same period?

The real alarm is the fact that the Government have simply ignored the findings of the Social Security Select Committee, which suggested that £1 in every £5 of

housing benefit was fraudulently claimed. That is a £2 billion burden on British taxpayers. Will the Secretary of State now accept Labour's view that we have to wage a war against organised landlord fraud in housing benefit? This afternoon, in the spirit of co-operation, I invite the Secretary of State to meet Labour Members to discuss our proposals for an assault on landlord cheats.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman's opening suggestion would be monstrous if it were not simply silly. Of course no fraudster has any exemption. We have cracked down harder on all forms of fraud, not least landlord fraud. Until we took action to galvanise local authorities into doing their duty in that respect, they were not taking the matter seriously.

As for taking seriously the Labour party's proposals, Labour proposes that there should be a programme of visits to landlords and tenants and that there should be eight minutes between each person visited, including travelling time. Is that a serious investigation of those who are fraudulently making claims? Our inquiries of those whom we suspect of that take an hour and a half. Ours is surely a much more thorough system than anything that Labour is proposing.

Sir David Madel: People being pursued for maintenance by the Child Support Agency often report to the CSA that they believe that their ex-partner is fraudulently claiming benefit. Will my right hon. Friend see that, when such an allegation is made, the Benefits Agency tells that person that his or her allegation is being properly investigated?

Mr. Lilley: I try to ensure that all allegations, particularly those received via the CSA, are passed on and followed up by the Benefits Agency. However, we cannot, for reasons of confidentiality, report back on the inquiries that are made to those who make the original allegations. It would be wrong to do so. I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise that, although we can give the assurance that those inquiries are followed through, it would be wrong to report back to those who made the original allegation on the guilt or innocence in, or the findings of, every investigation.

Disability Living Allowance

5. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received about changing the regulations relating to disability living allowance for long-stay hospital patients; and if he will make a statement. [1702]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Andrew Mitchell): The Department has received a number of representations. The responses have made it clear that the changes will affect only patients being maintained free of charge by the NHS.

Mr. Canavan: Can we have a parliamentary debate and vote on the matter, so that the Minister can tell us how on earth he can possibly justify such a miserable policy that will make it very difficult, if not impossible, for many long-stay hospital patients to travel to visit their friends and relatives or to take part in various community activities? The next time the Minister is sitting in the comfort of his chauffeur-driven ministerial limousine, will he reflect on the fact that he is depriving thousands of disabled people of their mobility rights and virtually incarcerating them in the institutions where they live?

Mr. Mitchell: A debate in Parliament on those changes is a matter for the usual channels, and I have no doubt that they will have heard what the hon. Gentleman said. The decision to make those changes was very carefully considered. Previously, disability living allowance mobility was not withdrawn or down-rated when someone went into hospital. The changes that we have made align DLA mobility with both DLA care and attendance allowances.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Does my hon. Friend agree that we would be more likely to take seriously what the Labour party says on this issue, were it not for the stark fact that more than six times as many people are helped with their care and mobility than were helped under the previous Labour Government? That is how much they cared. Do not the measures that we have discussed target help on people who need it most? Is that not what people who really care do, rather than weep crocodile tears?

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we target disability living allowance on those who most need it. We provide special protection for people who have been in hospital accommodation for 12 months or more. My hon. Friend will be aware of the sheer scale of Government spending on disability living allowance. Last year, we spent £3,700 million; this year we are likely to spend £4,400 million, which is an increase of £700 million; and next year there is likely to be a further increase of £600 million, to a total of £5 billion. That is an eloquent testimony to the Government's absolute commitment to helping disabled people.

Mr. Eric Clarke: Is the Minister aware of the consequences of that withdrawal? People are signing themselves out of hospital prematurely—before they are signed out by their doctors—and their carers are suffering. Were the Government motivated by greed when they introduced that change, because it was not done to help the carers?

Mr. Mitchell: I think that the hon. Gentleman has misunderstood the effects of the regulations. I will consider any particular case that he wants to raise with me in writing. On his specific point, the change affects payability and not entitlement, so those who are not in hospital accommodation for full days during the week will receive disability living allowance and mobility allowance in respect of those full days.

Occupational Pensions

6. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number of pensioners currently in receipt of occupational pensions. [1703]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Oliver Heald): The latest estimate is that there are some 6.5 million pensioners in receipt of

at least one occupational pension. More than 20 million people have rights to a pension from an occupational scheme, including those whose pensions are in payment.

Mr. Dunn: Given that the sum of £600 billion invested in British private pension funds is more than the figure for the rest of Europe put together, will the Minister assure the House that we will resist all attempts to have our pension funds expropriated by the European Union to pay pensions to foreigners?

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend highlights the success of the Government's policy in making our pensions system affordable. That achievement was recently applauded by the Select Committee on Social Security, and was reflected in OECD studies. It is vital that we ensure that our carefully won assets are not combined with other countries' liabilities—we should not end up having to pay the debts of pay-as-you-go schemes in Europe. The Government are committed to ensuring that—is the Labour party?

Mr. Wigley: Will the Minister resist the claptrap that we heard from the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), which creates unnecessary fears among pensioners that their pensions will be expropriated by people in other countries? There is no foundation whatsoever for that allegation, as the Minister well knows. Will he apply himself to the more serious question of the 45 per cent. of pensioner households in these islands that have no pension other than the state pension? What does he intend to do to restore the link that the Government destroyed in 1980?

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman should know that, under the Government, pensioners' incomes have increased on average by 51 per cent. in real terms. With his new-found Euro-enthusiasm—which no doubt has something to do with his party's views and interests—he should bear in mind the fact that debt is an important factor in the convergence criteria under the Maastricht treaty. It is extremely important that this country is committed to protecting its interests—and the Government are.

National Disability Council

7. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions he has had with the National Disability Council on possible additional functions for the council. [1704]

Mr. Burt: I am grateful for the opportunity to clarify the National Disability Council's duties, particularly in the light of recent statements by the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) which suggested that the council can give advice only when asked to do so by Ministers. Since its creation in January 1996, the council has had the power to give advice on its own initiative, and it has done so on a number of issues, including the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. It has also consulted widely and proposed a code of practice on the rights of access to goods, facilities, services and premises, which was published in July this year. The council's annual report identifies its priorities for the coming year, and details its ambitious work plan. There has therefore been no need to discuss extending the council's functions.

Mr. McFall: Does the Minister agree that every organisation for the disabled in Britain realises that the council has weaknesses, that it needs to be strengthened and that employment matters affecting disabled people should not be treated separately from other issues affecting their lives? Non-discrimination and access to work are what disabled people want, and a stronger council is therefore essential.

Mr. Burt: The question whether the National Advisory Council on Employment of People with Disabilities should retain its duty to advise the Secretary of State for Employment on matters relating to discrimination in employment was considered at the time of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are examining the matter; we expect to reach a conclusion some time next year, and changes may be made.

There is no doubt that advice and information on discrimination in employment are already being passed to those who need that advice and information, but I nevertheless say to organisations for disabled people that they should wait and see in regard to the council's abilities. It is already doing good work, and I think that it is proving a number of people's expectations wrong.

Mr. Tom Clarke: If the National Disability Council is as proactive as the Minister would have us believe, may I issue a specific challenge to him? Will he ask the council to investigate the outrageous discrimination that building societies are practising against disabled people, contrary to the spirit and letter of the Government's 1995 Act?

In particular, will the Minister join me in deploring the actions of the Alliance and Leicester and Halifax building societies, which are refusing bonus shares to disabled people because they are represented by carers or by supervisors in residential homes? Is that not outrageous discrimination? Will the Minister confirm the council's impotence, or inactivity, by telling us whether it will investigate the matter? Yes or no?

Mr. Burt: If there were prizes for huffing and puffing, the hon. Gentleman would be head and shoulders above the rest of us. I note that, in his opening remarks, he did not deny that my interpretation of the NDC's power was entirely contrary to what he has been saying in recent weeks. I hope that he will now withdraw his observations and apologise, because he got it wrong.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, the building society issue has been a source of concern for some time, and my officials have made representations to the building societies' organisations. I shall be meeting representatives of the building societies tomorrow. Under existing legislation, it is possible for societies to make changes to their practices and procedures to ensure that disabled people are not subject to discrimination. If the NDC wishes to advise me and to make any representations in relation to building societies, it is free to do so. The hon. Gentleman should at least recognise that now, because he has had it wrong.

State Pension

9. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to uprate the state pension in line with earnings. [1706]

Mr. Lilley: No. If the basic state pension had been increased in line with earnings rather than prices since 1980, the extra cost to the taxpayer would be £7.5 billion.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Secretary of State recognise that, had the pension been raised in line with earnings rather than prices since that date, millions of pensioners would not have been robbed of a large proportion of their pensions? Many pensioners would not be living in the poverty in which they live, and future generations of pensioners would be able to look forward to some degree of security and reliability in their retirement rather than being prey to heavy selling by private pension organisations that charge up to 25 per cent. of contributions in administration costs, as well as making enormous profits.

Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that the community as a whole would be better off with a state pension on which every pensioner could live, rather than the poverty that many face?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman is honest and open—as is Lady Castle—about his policies and is prepared to admit to their cost. I respect him for it. I respect rather less the leader of the Labour party and the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), the Labour spokeswoman, who rejected Lady Castle's policies at their party conference and simply bought off her supporters by making extremely expensive promises to include them in a review, concealing the likely cost of the exposed policies from the electorate.

I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's statement about the preferability of state pensions over occupational pensions. I am delighted that two thirds of people retiring have occupational pensions. On average, those pensions are two thirds higher in real terms than when Labour were last in power.

Mr. Atkins: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, since it has been in government, the Conservative party has met every pledge that it made to the electorate about keeping pensions in line with inflation and about doing our best to help elderly and senior citizens? Does he also agree that that policy will continue for as long as there is a Conservative Government and that we have a proud record, which we can go to the country with and fight on when the time comes?

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend is right and makes an important point. I hope that his remarks will be read and noted by all Britain's pensioners. We have fulfilled our pledge to uprate the basic pension at least in line with inflation. We have focused extra help on the least well-off pensioners through more than £1 billion more in pensions premiums for those on income support. We have encouraged the remarkable growth of occupational pensions to the point where we are better placed—not just than any other country in Europe, but than all other countries in Europe put together—to fund future pensions.

Miss Hoey: Has the Secretary of State had time yet to consider the serious implications arising out of the Social Security Select Committee report on unfunded pension liabilities in Europe? Will it be him or the Chancellor of the Exchequer who responds to our report?

Mr. Lilley: I am considering the Select Committee report, which is important and makes the important point, which I have just made, that we have some £600 billion more to meet the liabilities to present and future pensioners, which is more than all other countries in the European Community. I will respond to that report in the normal way, within the three-month deadline that is allowed for thorough and proper consideration of the important issues that it raises.

Basic Pension

10. **Mrs. Roe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes he has made in his policy towards the basic pension since the last election; and if he will make a statement. [1707]

Mr. Heald: We remain committed to maintaining the value of the basic pension, which will continue to be the foundation on which people can build retirement income.

Mrs. Roe: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, if pensions had been uprated in line with earnings, as advocated by Baroness Castle, taxpayers would now be paying around £8 billion a year more? Does he agree that to buy off support for the proposal by promising an upward review of pensions in the next Parliament is bound to be cripplingly expensive, yet that is exactly what the Labour leader has done?

Mr. Heald: At its conference, the Labour party bowed to trade unions and to Baroness Castle. It is clearly not ruling out restoring the earnings link or reversing our changes to the state earnings-related pension scheme. That could change the picture—which is so well described in the Social Security Select Committee's report—of the British pensions system as affordable by the year 2030 while others are not. Such a change would be worrying and irresponsible.

Ms Lynne: Is the Minister aware that pensioners find it difficult to manage on a basic state pension and that £1 billion a year is not claimed in income-related benefit by the poorest pensioners who do not know what they are entitled to? Will the Minister consider introducing a take-up campaign to ensure that pensioners are aware of what they are entitled to because if they do not receive income support, they are not allowed to receive even cold weather payments?

Mr. Heald: The Government are doing three things. They are maintaining the value of the basic pension, encouraging private provision and targeting help on people most in need—£1.2 billion a year extra since 1988. The hon. Lady is right to say that it is important that pensioners know what their entitlements are. We spend £26 million a year informing the public of the benefits available. We send out information to 80,000 information points—everything from citizens advice bureaux to doctors surgeries. In addition, we send our advisers to explain to pensioners groups what the entitlements are. No other strategy would work better than what we are doing.

Mr. Nigel Evans: It is right to applaud the two thirds of pensioners who have occupational pensions, but there remains one third who do not have them. Will my hon. Friend confirm that Government policies will ensure that the incomes of those pensioners will be protected through the basic state pension? Will he further confirm that the last time those pensioners had a real devaluation in their spending power was between 1974 and 1979, when inflation let rip and those who had saved money from their wages during their working years found their savings greatly depleted due to the inflationary policies of the Labour Government?

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend is right. Under Labour, when inflation was running at 27 per cent., pensioners were robbed of the savings they had accumulated throughout their lives. The rise in state pensions during the whole of the period of the Labour Government was equivalent to the rise in average incomes for pensioners that this Government have produced every year since 1979. The Government's policies protect the interests of pensioners and I am sure that pensioners in my hon. Friend's constituency will appreciate that.

Ms Harman: Does the Minister recognise that pensioners feel betrayed by the Government? They do not feel that the Government have protected their interests, because they have imposed VAT on gas and electricity, presided over the mis-selling of personal pensions, failed to get help to the 700,000 very poorest pensioners, forced pensioners to sell their homes to pay for nursing care, cut the value of SERPS and cut the value of the basic state pension. Is not that why pensioners will never again trust the Tories?

Mr. Heald: The Labour party has had 17 years to think of something better than what the Government are doing. It thought through the Social Justice Commission, and the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) described it as the best bit of work since Beveridge—and then dropped it. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) was told to think the unthinkable, but he thought only the unaffordable and was moved on. Now, the policy of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) is to think about it some more and have a review.

Ideas such as the flexible decade of retirement—proposed by Labour—which would allow people to retire on a pension at 60 would mean £15 billion a year in additional costs or a reduction in the state pension to £40 a week. The hon. Lady should come clean and say which she is proposing.

Mr. David Shaw: Will my hon. Friend assure me that Britain has the best balanced pension system in Europe, with a good balance between private and public pensions? Will he further assure me that the assets in our pension funds will not be used to meet the liabilities of pension funds in Europe?

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend is right to say that this country has a partnership between the private sector, the public sector and the individual. Over time, it is delivering huge increases in pensioners' incomes—not just for those with average pensions, but for the bottom 20 per cent. whose incomes have risen in real terms by 20 per cent. since 1979. I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that we will ensure that we do not end up paying for other countries' pension liabilities.

Incapacity Benefit

11. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many incapacity benefit claimants have been found to be fit for work by the all-work test since its introduction; how many of these have since claimed benefits as unemployed and seeking work; and how many have obtained employment. [1708]

Mr. Burt: Up to the end of September 1996, about 178,000 incapacity benefit claimants had been found capable of work following the all-work test. Some 73,000 claimed unemployment benefits. A total of 47,000 have since left the register. About 10,000 were placed in employment or on training schemes by the Employment Service.

Mr. Michie: Are not thousands of disabled people a great deal worse off now than they were 18 months ago due to the all-work test? Does not the fact that almost 50 per cent. of those who have appealed have been successful show that the test has not targeted those who really need the benefit?

Mr. Burt: No. As I said, the number of people whose appeals are successful is very similar to the number who were successful using the social security appeal tribunal. As for incomes, perhaps the hon. Gentleman did not hear me earlier when I said that the Government have quadrupled spending on benefits. Those facts answer his charges. The Government have shown no meanness towards disabled people.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Will my hon. Friend tell us how many claimants succeed in appeal who do not succeed in their first application, and what the main reasons for that success might be?

Mr. Burt: The reasons for success at appeal vary. People sometimes succeed at appeal because they are able to bring extra evidence to the tribunal; sometimes they succeed simply because the panel reconsiders the decision. The great strength of the system is that it enables an independent review to be conducted. In terms of the number of people who succeed in their appeals, the system is working in a manner that is not dissimilar to how it worked before.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Does the Minister accept—not least because of the figures he has just given to the House—that there are well-founded apprehensions that people are falling between the two stools of receiving incapacity benefit and jobseeker's allowance, unable to find work and falling into destitution? In the interests of public confidence and the good functioning of the incapacity benefit system—as well as open government and an appropriate accountability of the Executive to Parliament—will he make available for scrutiny by Parliament the draft contract for contracting out the Benefits Agency medical service?

Mr. Burt: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that we have hardly any evidence of people—as he described

them—falling between the stools. The answer to a parliamentary question tabled by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) revealed that only a tiny percentage of people who applied for the jobseeker's allowance did not receive it after they had been knocked off incapacity benefit, and that they were unsuccessful only because they had placed restrictions on their employment. A range of measures has been designed to make it easy for disabled people who may have lost incapacity benefit to retain benefit. I think that the hon. Gentleman will be reassured by the fact that we have asked the Policy Studies Institute to conduct a review of those who leave incapacity benefit so that we can ensure that some of the worries that he expressed are not realised.

More information will be made available about the contractorisation of the Benefits Agency medical service. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will find that his questions will be answered, as they have been up to now.

State Pension

12. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what work he has commissioned from the Government Actuary to examine the cost of allowing people to claim a full state pension at 60 years. [1709]

Mr. Lilley: The cost of allowing people to draw their pension at age 60 would be an extra £15 billion per year.

Mr. Evennett: I thank my right hon. Friend for that very informative reply. Does he agree that such a proposal would require huge increases in taxation, or a reduction in the value of the pension? Furthermore, is he aware that the Labour party is merely trying to lure pensioners with those promises? But pensioners will not be fooled. They know that they have had a very good deal under the Government, and they will stick with us.

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right: the Opposition's policy is to allow people to draw their pension at age 60. The cost of doing so would be an extra £15 billion, unless the level of the basic pension were reduced. The former Opposition spokesman used to refuse to tell me which option they would choose. Imagine my astonishment, therefore, when the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) wrote to me to say:

"we anticipate . . . a lower level of basic state pension."

She went on to say that she would ask the Government Actuary's Department by how much the basic state pension would have to be cut to eliminate the cost to taxpayers. I have asked the Government Actuary for her. He says that the basic state pension would have to be cut by £20 for a single person for the rest of their life.

Mr. Denham: Why is the Secretary of State wasting the time of the Government Actuary's Department by asking what the cost of retirement on a full state pension would be at 60, when no political party is making that proposal? Is this not another example of civil servants' time being wasted on party-political propaganda? Instead, why does he not accept the growing case for flexibility in the state retirement age? Why does he insist on a one-size-fits-all welfare state when different people want to live their lives in different ways? Why should not people have some choice in the way in which they take the pension benefits that they have paid for? As long as personal choice is not subsidised by others, and no one needs to be worse off, why does he want to stop people having the right to choose when they draw their pension?

Mr. Lilley: I asked the Government Actuary to cost Labour's proposal of allowing people to retire at 60 because the hon. Member for Peckham wrote to me suggesting that I did. It is wrong to suggest that Labour's policy would give pensioners more flexibility than ours does. At present and in future, anyone who defers retiring by a year can increase their pension by 7 per cent. for the rest of their life; deferring for two years leads to an increase of 14 per cent., and so on. The only difference in Labour's proposals is that pensioners would start with a basic pension £20 lower.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 November. [1726]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Janner: Why is the Prime Minister so determined that people who work in this country should have no statutory minimum holiday rights, while also having no statutory maximum working hours, meaning that they can be forced to work more than 48 hours a week contrary to their wishes? Is not that an unjust, unreasonable and typically Tory policy, going against even their own alleged policy of supporting family rights?

The Prime Minister: I shall tell the hon. and learned Gentleman crisply; Britain wants good jobs, not worthless directives.

Q2. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 November. [1727]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a huge contrast between yesterday's excellent news of British Aerospace's success in winning the large Hawk order from Australia, which will guarantee British jobs, and the dismay felt by many British businesses at today's news of the adverse European ruling on the 48-hour week? Will he reassure British business that he will do all that he can to resist that Euro-measure, which will undermine the competitive edge of British business and is an adverse decision by a political court?

The Prime Minister: Australia's selection of British Aerospace to supply Hawks is the latest illustration of the keen competitiveness of British industry generally and the British aerospace industry in particular.

I think that not only will today's European Court of Justice ruling damage the prospects of job creation, should it not be reversed; it has disappointed British business men, as they have made clear repeatedly this morning at the Confederation of British Industry. The position is unacceptable. We cannot agree that our competitiveness should be undermined in this way. Were we to do so, it would clearly be the thin end of the wedge—to judge from what the European Commissioner has said this morning. I have made it clear to the President of the Commission that I shall insist on changes at the intergovernmental conference to ensure that the social protocol will never again be undermined by the presentation of social measures, falsely, under the guise of health and safety.

Mr. Blair: Will the Prime Minister now answer the question asked by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner)? Quite apart from Europe, why is he so opposed to a law that says that people are perfectly free to work more than 48 hours a week, but cannot be compelled to, and gives them minimum holiday entitlements? Is he going to fight the next election on the basis of, "vote Tory for no right to a holiday"?

The Prime Minister: Yet again, the right hon. Gentleman is in danger of missing the point. Unemployment is falling as we become more competitive. The directive could reverse that trend and similar directives could push unemployment up, instead of it continuing to fall. I am not prepared to accept that. I want jobs, not directives. I want Britain to continue to create jobs and unemployment to continue to fall. I do not want to place more burdens on business so that unemployment either remains stuck at a very high level or rises from that very high level as it has in other European countries. Competitiveness will create jobs. I want people to be in work. Presumably, the right hon. Gentleman is prepared to keep them out of work.

Mr. Blair: Perhaps the Prime Minister can tell us of a successful company in Britain that does not give its work force a holiday.

Hon. Members: Exactly.

Madam Speaker: Order. Stop shouting and barracking, for goodness' sake. I want to hear the questions and the answers.

Mr. Blair: If the directive is so dreadful, why did the Minister not vote against it when he had the chance to do so? May we be clear about the Government's position at the intergovernmental conference? Will the Prime Minister confirm that his position is this: all member states must agree at the outset of the conference that no progress will be made on any change proposed by any country in respect of any issue until the directive is reversed? Is that his position?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman's first point was correct, why do we need the directive? He made precisely the Government's point. Such directives pile burdens on business and they are bound to undermine our economic success. Their damage to the fruits of our economic success will affect the extra resources that we are providing to the health service, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will set out in a White Paper tomorrow. They will damage the provision of opportunity for all four-year-olds to have nursery education, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment will set out tomorrow. I am not prepared to allow the product of years of good, sound economic management to be undermined by regulation from Brussels. I shall tell the right hon. Gentleman precisely what the position is at the intergovernmental conference: it is exactly the same as it was on the social chapter at Maastricht. I shall not accept what has been determined by the court today and, at the end of the intergovernmental conference, I shall demand that change or there will be no end to the intergovernmental conference.

Mr. Blair: So it will be at the end of the intergovernmental conference—which will, conveniently, be after the election. We can hear escape routes being planned already. Is it not back to beef when, five months on, the Government have not even got the gelatine ban lifted? It is the same old pattern. They seize on an issue, they talk tough, they alienate everybody and then they cave in. May I suggest that the law that gives people the right to a minimum holiday is not the issue upon which to launch beef war mark 2?

The Prime Minister: Saving British jobs is the issue upon which to draw the line. The right hon. Gentleman may be prepared to live in an area of high unemployment. Unemployment in Britain is falling—I want it to come down much further—but prescriptive directives from Brussels will stop that. We shall seek treaty change, without which there will be no conclusion to the intergovernmental conference. I shall not accept the nonsense that the right hon. Gentleman has been talking about the directive without understanding its impact on British companies. I have written today to the President of the Commission to make clear that we are tabling our proposals for a change in the treaty, and we shall expect that change to be agreed.

Q3. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 November. [1728]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Luff: In the light of the demolition by the Confederation of British Industry of the case for a so-called windfall tax on the privatised utilities, will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to reassure the House that he will not make it his policy to impose such a tax? Does he agree that the effect of such a tax on the prices of shares held by trade unions and other pension funds would, in fact, be a tax on pensioners—to say nothing about the disastrous effects on consumers through higher prices?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is of course right. A windfall tax would hit consumers; it would hit shareholders; it would hit employees. It is a tax not on utilities but on jobs, pensions and people's utility bills. The shadow Chancellor either cannot or still will not tell the House which privatised companies would pay.

how much they would pay and how he would stop investment and customers being hit. If he wants professional advice as to what such a tax might mean, perhaps he might go home and seek it. He ought to tell the House exactly what he proposes. His silence means that the only thing that we know for sure is that Labour would put up taxes and is keeping quiet about just how much the increase would be.

Q4. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 November. [1731]

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Sir David Steel: May I refer the right hon. Gentleman back to the negotiations that took place over the European directive? If he looks at *Hansard*, he will find that, on 7 July 1992, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment boasted to the House that

"the United Kingdom secured all its key objectives, in particular the right for employees to work for more than 48 hours a week if they choose to do so."—[*Official Report*, 7 July 1992; Vol. 211, c. 175.]

In a word, she said, "We have won." Was she not right? If they won, why are they going to war over something that they did not even vote against?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend did get significant exclusions—that is true—but the directive is damaging. We made it clear from the outset that we would seek a change in the European Court and that we would then seek to have the directive's impact reversed. The right hon. Gentleman should realise two things. First, this is a damaging directive. Secondly, if we were to accept this directive under that treaty head, it would be but the first of many others, as was implicitly made clear by the European Commissioner this morning. I am concerned to ensure that we protect our jobs and our competitiveness. All over Europe—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members do not like it. There are 18 million unemployed people across Europe. Elsewhere in Europe, they are staying unemployed; here, they are getting back into work. That is why we will not accept such legislation.

Mr. Lamont: Surely the real issue is not whether what the Leader of the Opposition says is right or wrong or whether the working time directive is right or wrong, but whether the matter ought to be decided in Brussels or by the elected Government of this country. What is the point in holding elections if the elected Government cannot carry out the policies on which they were elected?

The Prime Minister: I have no objection at all to businesses and their employees reaching whatever agreement they wish on working hours. That is entirely right in a properly functioning competitive economy. Like my right hon. Friend, what I object to in principle is working conditions being dictated from Brussels when they should be determined here, in this House. Other European countries can accept that if they wish, but they cannot then complain if businesses relocate from the rest of Europe to here as a result—like the 1,200 that *Le Figaro* reported last week have relocated from France to here. As *Le Figaro* said:

"Why stay in France if conditions for entrepreneurs are better in Britain?"

I do not want that said of Britain. That is why we are determined to keep the right measures to create jobs for our citizens in the future.

Q5. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 November. [1732]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Rooney: Will the Prime Minister tell the House why he favours a free vote on caning but not on gun control?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman thinks the question of gun control is appropriate for a free vote, I do not agree with him. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] The Government considered the Cullen report, we made a judgment on the right way to implement it and we propose to stand by that judgment, lay it before the House of Commons and invite it to support us.

Q6. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 November. [1733]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Alexander: May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the by-election result on Thursday to Newark and Sherwood district council? The Conservative candidate, Mr. Bryan Richardson, took the seat from Labour with a swing of 5.8 per cent. May I put it to my right hon. Friend that results such as that are far more typical of support in the country than the public opinion polls, and that if we continue with sensible policies my right hon. Friend is on course for a record fifth Conservative victory?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate Mr. Richardson on his win, although I am assured by the Under–Secretary of State for Social Security, my hon. Friend, the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), that we have taken seats with even larger swings elsewhere in Nottinghamshire in the past two or three weeks. What we are seeing, if I may put it this way, is Conservatives coming home.

Working Time Directive

3.31 pm

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian Lang): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the working time directive.

The Court of Justice of the European Communities has today given its judgment in the proceedings that we brought to have Council directive 93/104/EC—the "working time directive"—annulled. That directive derives its origins and impetus from the 1989 Community charter of the fundamental social rights of workers, to which the United Kingdom did not subscribe then, and does not now.

The directive was adopted by the Council at a meeting on 23 November 1993 and was forced on the United Kingdom through the use of the qualified majority voting procedure, by being adopted by the European Council under article 118A of the treaty establishing the European Community, which relates to the health and safety of workers. It is due to be implemented on 23 November.

A common position on the proposals for the directive had been reached by Social and Labour Affairs Ministers at a meeting on 1 June 1993. At that meeting, the United Kingdom announced its intention to challenge the directive's legal base. Our legal challenge was mounted in March 1994.

The directive's main provisions include limiting the working week to an average of 48 hours; putting various restrictions on the length of night work; and giving employees entitlements to minimum daily and weekly rest periods and to a period of paid annual leave. Our case before the court was essentially that those are matters relating to terms and conditions of employment, which should be settled by employers and employees, and not truly health and safety at work matters.

The court has now delivered its judgment and I am arranging for the text of the judgment to be placed in the Library.

The court has in essence confirmed the Advocate General's earlier opinion that the directive was properly adopted under article 118A of the treaty. That is not what was envisaged when we agreed to article 118A as a health and safety provision. We shall therefore insist that the intergovernmental conference addresses the issues that the European Court of Justice judgment raises. That means both ensuring that the working time directive no longer affects the United Kingdom, and securing measures to prevent any other "social engineering" directives being forced on the United Kingdom by similar manoeuvres.

The use of article 118A in that fashion wholly undermines the spirit of our opt-out from the social chapter, as agreed at Maastricht. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has already told the House, he has today written to President Jacques Santer making clear in the most unequivocal terms our proposals to correct the position. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library.

In his letter, my right hon. Friend makes clear the fact that the broad interpretation of article 118A implied by the judgment goes directly counter to the spirit of what we agreed at Maastricht. It is unacceptable and must be remedied.

My right hon. Friend has therefore made it clear that at the IGC the Government will table amendments aimed at ensuring that article 118A cannot in future be used as it has been on this occasion, and at dealing with the specific problem of the working time directive. The Government have affirmed that, as my right hon. Friend also said in his letter, we attach the utmost importance to such amendments, and will insist that they form part of the outcome of the intergovernmental conference.

In the meantime, of course, we have no option but to obey the law until we secure the necessary treaty changes. But we shall legislate to implement the directive only after carrying out proper and necessary public consultation on the issues and options. In doing so, we shall aim to take advantage of the valuable derogations already secured during our negotiations on the directive. We are determined to preserve the flexibility in labour matters which has been such an important element in the revival of our economy over recent years. British industry would expect us to do no less.

Before the Maastricht negotiations, the use of qualified majority voting was agreed by member states for genuine matters concerning health and safety at work. Never for a moment was it envisaged that those arrangements could properly be applied to what we would always regard as social measures, including the general regulation of working time, rest periods and holidays.

We have always been fully committed to protections needed to ensure good health and safety standards for British and other European workers. But employers and employees should also be free to agree terms and conditions—including arrangements for working time, rest breaks and holidays—that meet their particular circumstances and needs. We reject the imposition on industry of unnecessary requirements that cannot but damage competitiveness and jobs, and we consider that the directive would be the thin end of a wedge that would lead to more such burdens.

Because the working time directive is incompatible with those principles, and because of what appeared to be the improper use of procedures to force it through, we had no option but to bring proceedings to have it annulled. Avoiding unnecessary burdens on British businesses remains at the top of the Government's agenda. So we firmly intend to close the loophole that allowed the working time directive through, and to restore the rights of British companies and their employees to reach on such matters agreements that reflect the requirements of their particular circumstances.

The competitiveness of our industry is the key to economic success, employment and prosperity. We are not prepared to have it unnecessarily trammelled, as it would be by the judgment.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): The Secretary of State said that the directive had been forced on the United Kingdom through the use of the qualified majority voting procedure. First, will he confirm that it was the present Government who accepted the introduction of qualified majority voting and diluted the British veto? So is it not a bit late to complain about that now? Secondly, will he acknowledge that the directive has been under debate since 1990, before the social chapter was even drafted, and that negotiations on it were completed before the Maastricht treaty was signed?

If the Government genuinely believe that the directive cuts across their opt-out from the social chapter and raises issues that they thought that they had settled, why did the Prime Minister not raise the matter at the previous intergovernmental conference, where those matters were discussed, before the directive went on to the statute book? Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Government failed even to vote against it, that this procedure has been used similarly in respect of the protection of young workers and of maternity leave—legislation that has now been implemented—and that the Government's own negotiator said that the directive was toothless and that, as has been pointed out before, the Government had won in the negotiations?

Why have the Government wasted three years on a court case which, given the background, they were always likely to lose, when member states have a great deal of discretion in the way in which they implement the directive to allow for shift systems and other practical implications, and when the Government could have used that time to work with British industry on the handling of a measure that will now become law next week? How much taxpayers' money has been spent, as I understand that costs have been awarded against the Government?

Is this not simply another example of the Government's posturing on Europe, whereby—as they did in respect of bovine spongiform encephalopathy—they begin with neglect, proceed to posturing, and end up having to cave in, having lost friends, respect and the argument along the way? Given that what stands out a mile is that, if the Government mean it, they have made a mess of it, will not the President of the Board of Trade admit that what shines clearly through the wording of the Government's previous statements on this subject and their handling of the matter is their dislike of the substance of the directive?

Will the Secretary of State admit that the directive does not outlaw voluntary overtime and that it has a string of exemptions as long as one's arm to allow for any practical problems? Are the Government really saying that there should be no protection at all against being forced to work long hours and no provision for reasonable breaks? Is it not true that the Department of Health admitted last year that it had destroyed copies of a Government-financed study that found that working more than 48 hours a week doubles the risk of heart disease? Is it not true that Professor Harrington's report, which the Government used in their case, shows that this is a health and safety matter and that, contrary to Government claims, the proposed norm is not unreasonable—and that the Government refuse to release that report, too?

Last, but by no means least, are the Government really arguing that British citizens should, alone in Europe, have no legal right whatever to any paid holidays—something that would directly benefit 2.5 million members of the work force? Now that the Prime Minister has pledged that those holiday rights will be taken away if he is re-elected, is that not another powerful reason to vote against this Government at the next election?

Mr. Lang: It is the Government's view that holidays are a matter that should be negotiated between employers and employees. The provisions affecting employment conditions contained in the directive—which cover many matters other than holidays, including the length of the working week, the range of shift patterns, daily and weekly breaks, and other issues—should be resolved at work by employers and employees, not handed down from Brussels and imposed on the United Kingdom in a way that is contrary to our economic interests.

The right hon. Lady referred to qualified majority voting. The point is that article 118A was used precisely to achieve the directive through qualified majority voting, because we had secured an opt-out from the social chapter. Yesterday, the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) proudly proclaimed to the Confederation of British Industry that Labour would not approve any more qualified majority voting, yet the Labour party wants to sign up to the social chapter and wants to accept the working time directive through qualified majority voting.

The right hon. Lady asked about abstention. At the negotiations, part of our purpose was to secure the best possible set of derogations and flexibilities for the benefit of the British people. That was secured, in the context of which an agreement to abstain took place. At the same time, we made it clear that we would challenge this case in the court, and that is what we subsequently did.

The right hon. Lady referred to overtime. Absolutely no effect on overtime arises from the directive—that is another typical Labour scare. The directive is about working hours and working conditions. The right hon. Lady suggests that we do not care about health and safety provisions. Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992, employers are required to take into account hazards such as fatigue when developing employment conditions.

The right hon. Lady also referred to health. Professor Harrington's report, which, as we have always made clear, could be published only after the case had concluded, states that the scientific basis for establishing optimal hours of work is in doubt. It adds that it is impossible to be dogmatic on scientific grounds about the maximum hours to be working each week, and states that there is no firm scientific basis for setting a specific numerical lower limit.

Is it not a fact that the Labour party wants to accept the working time directive and to impose the social chapter, because it welcomes the imposition of those burdens by Brussels on employers and companies in this country? It has no compunction whatever about piling burdens on business. The Labour party is afraid to stand up for an issue of principle in Europe and would compromise the competitiveness of British industry. We have achieved a Britain that is the enterprise centre of Europe and we are determined to ensure that it stays that way.

Mr. John Biffen (North Shropshire): May I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and in so doing commend the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) about the importance of developing national institutions for guarding and developing what are essentially national issues? In that context, is it not clear that the price for European partnership cannot be purchased by the danegeld of recurring European bureaucracy, recurring European integration and, above all, long-term aspirations for European uniformity? Will my right hon. Friend convey those homespun comments to his friends at the intergovernmental conference?

Mr. Lang: I shall gladly convey my right hon. Friend's comments; he is right to put his finger on the recurring

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nature of the problem identified by the working time directive. It is not merely the directive with which we are threatened, damaging though that would be to British industry. There is also the social chapter—two of the directives under that are already in place and many more are under consideration, discussion or negotiation. It is clear that the Labour party would accept all of them. It is what is coming down that pipeline that would be so damaging to us. This directive would be the thin end of the wedge and that is why we are right to stand on principle and to insist that, as was agreed at Maastricht, those are matters that should be decided by us and not by Brussels.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): Why are the Government so keen for Britain to compete economically by making employees work longer hours and miss out on the holiday entitlement that our European competitors are prepared to grant? As Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, does not the right hon. Gentleman have the confidence that the British economy is strong enough for us to compete on the quality and innovation of our goods and services? Do we not have higher priorities at the IGC on which to use what is left of Britain's bargaining position and credit in Europe, rather than trying to jettison such a measure, which the majority of the British people will regard as a sensible guarantee against abuse in the workplace?

Mr. Lang: The best way to secure good working conditions for the British work force is to have a successful economy, growing, expanding and creating jobs. If one compares our unemployment rate of 7.4 per cent. with the rate of more than 10 per cent. in Germany, more than 12 per cent. in France and more than 20 per cent. in Spain, one begins to see the contrast between our approach, of a flexible labour force seeking to be competitive, and the burdens imposed on all those countries in Europe, which are so damaging their economic performance.

Sir Michael Neubert (Romford): Is not the problem for the rest of Europe the fact that, as Jacques Delors correctly predicted, with our flexible labour laws, Britain has become a paradise for investment? Is not the essential and inescapable point that we are part of a world market? Our competitors overseas must be rubbing their hands with glee to see Europe tying itself in knots over this issue.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right. The very fact that we secure 30 per cent. of all the inward investment coming to Europe, including 40 per cent. of that from the United States of America and Japan, shows the contrast between our approach to competitiveness and that of our European counterparts. More tellingly, the fact that 300 German companies are now manufacturing in Britain underlines the fact that we have the right approach to those matters.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I am in favour of the sensible limitation of working hours, but there is no doubt in my mind that legislation affecting social conditions, including working hours, is a matter for this Parliament and not for the European Council of Ministers or the European Court of Justice. However, is the Minister not aware that the great chink in our armour turns out to be acceptance of qualified majority voting over a wide area of European affairs—an agreement reached under the Single European Act and passed by the former Conservative Government? Is the right hon. Gentleman not aware that the big threat to our competitiveness is not the virtually empty social charter, but the danger that Britain will find itself part of a single currency in Europe?

Mr. Lang: The real danger would come from a Labour Government willing to accept all these social imposts—through the social chapter, the working time directive, and all the other burdens that could be imposed through article 118A under health and safety considerations. We must resist that in order to remain competitive.

Sir Michael Spicer (South Worcestershire): As the Prime Minister accepted earlier, this is a question not so much of the details of the directive but of whether this country is to be ruled by an unelected court or by Parliament. Will my right hon. Friend say a little more about what the Government intend to do about that?

Mr. Lang: I agree with my hon. Friend. That is why, in the Maastricht treaty negotiations, the Prime Minister secured the opt-out, which was designed to protect us from the kind of social burdens now being sent down through the back door via article 118A. My right hon. Friend has made it clear that, at the IGC, we shall insist that this matter is dealt with and that the spirit of the social opt-out is honoured. He also made it clear that no progress on other issues can be made at that conference until this is agreed.

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): Is it not out of all proportion for the Government to say that they will block the outcome of the IGC and damage relations with our European partners for a measure that the director general of the CBI said today will not substantially change current working patterns, and which the Government did not even vote against in the Council of Ministers?

Mr. Lang: This is an issue of principle: whether the social opt-out agreed at Maastricht should be sustained and honoured, or whether it will be abused and circumvented. It is not just the impact of the working time directive; there are other proposals under the social chapter and under the medium-term social action programme being developed by Commissioner Flynn. We know that the Labour party would accept all those measures; that would be immensely damaging to this country and would remove our capacity, as a country and a Parliament, to be responsible for working conditions.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Does my right hon. Friend agree that if a health and safety measure will have a serious impact on reducing casualties at work, it should not be made optional? If it is said to be optional, the case that it concerns health and safety is given away.

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the directive will not apply to most people who are paid salaries, and that it could really apply only to those who are paid hourly? Will he find out whether European

Commissioners, senior officials in Brussels and, for that matter, members of the European Court of Justice work more than 48 hours a week—and what their health records are?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend makes a good point. It is clear that the relationship between working hours and health and safety is at best unproven. We defer to no other country in our commitment to having in place sound, relevant health and safety provisions. Indeed, we already have them under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and the 1992 regulations. The head of the EU's representation in the United Kingdom has already emphasised the progress on flexibilities developed in the negotiations; and it is clear that the final state of the directive bears no relation to health and safety considerations. It is in fact a piece of social engineering.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): On health and safety, do not the Government have a good case in respect of offshore workers, for whom the dangers are twofold? A reduction in working hours would require more helicopter flights and the development of new and high-quality safety habits. So why have the Government been so singularly inept in advancing those two strong arguments? Is it because they are so isolated in Europe that even when they have a good case, they cannot advance it because no one wants to listen to them?

Mr. Lang: There are already exemptions in the directive, one of which includes offshore workers. Commissioner Flynn made it clear today that he intends to bring out a White Paper to reduce the exemptions, to tighten the ratchet and to diminish the derogations and easements available. We are right to stand firm on the principle and to insist on reversing the position and restoring our capacity to control our own employment conditions.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the importance of this court judgment has nothing to do with how many hours may be worked in Britain; rather, it has to do with who makes the laws, this House or a foreign jurisdiction? As my right hon. Friend has rightly promised to see off the directive by treaty change, and as that treaty change will require the agreement of all other member states, we shall have to invest a huge amount of negotiating capital to achieve that. Why has my right hon. Friend such a narrow objective? Will he not use this opportunity also to see off the innumerable other ways in which the powers of this House have already been lost to the European legal system, and tell us what other directives and measures he will seek to repeal?

Mr. Lang: I agree with the premise to my right hon. Friend's question. With regard to the question, my present responsibility is confined to the directive, but I shall convey his views to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I am sure that the lesson will be learnt by our partners in Europe from our commitment to ensuring that the position is reversed.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the Secretary of State agree that the flexibility in working hours that enables employers and employees to deliver projects on time against competition is making our industry successful? Does he further agree that, instead of interfering with what is making Britain prosperous, the European auditors would be far better employed doing something about the billions of pounds' worth of fraud that goes on every year undetected?

Mr. Lang: I am glad to agree with the hon. Gentleman on both points.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): Will my right hon. Friend remind the House that the Government are responsible for the safety, health and well-being of work people in this country? Does he accept that the great worry is not the directive but, following on the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Biffen), the precedent for the future that must be guarded against?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right. That would be the thin end of the wedge. That is why we are determined to close the loophole, as well as reversing the effect of the working time directive.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Why does the President of the Board of Trade consistently give incorrect and misleading statements to the House? Surely there is no social chapter in the Union treaty signed at Maastricht. There is, however, a subsection headed "social policy" in the Single European Act passed in 1986.

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that in the Union treaty of Maastricht there is a social agreement? That agreement contains no list of legislation to be put before the signatory countries or this House. It is a means of promoting social legislation, which is then put to the Commission and goes through the usual channels of the articles of the treaty and the legislative processes already established. Are not all those facts correct? Why do the Government continue to make statements that are inaccurate and misleading?

Mr. Lang: I am sure that I have not deliberately made any inaccurate or misleading statements. The social chapter is, indeed, a conduit through which directives can be introduced. That is what concerned us about it. The vast majority of such directives would be governed by qualified majority voting and would be imposed on this country. That is why we secured the opt-out, why it is so valuable to us and why we so strongly resist the intentions of the Labour party to sign the social chapter.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Is it not clear that the essence of the court verdict has nothing to do with holiday rights or health and safety, but that once again the British Parliament is being told what to do by a foreign court? That decision was taken following a decision made by the European Commission with the supine support of members of the Council of Ministers who have economic interests in Britain being brought low and not being left in the high economic plane where it is. That decision was made in thoroughly bad faith. Is it not time that we told the European Commission and the Council of Ministers that if we are not to get fair play, and if the rights of nation states are not to be honoured, we are prepared to leave the European Union?

Mr. Lang: I agree with every word of the preamble to my hon. and learned Friend's question. However, as to

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our negotiating tactics at the intergovernmental conference, we are correct to take the position set out by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in his letter to President Jacques Santer and to insist that no progress will be made until we have secured the opt-out that we require.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Does the President of the Board of Trade recall that he is a vice-president of the European Movement in Scotland and that he did not argue against the Single European Act, which has led to many of the directives that we discuss in this House?

As to the serious issue of the intergovernmental conference, is the right hon. Gentleman saying, as did the Prime Minister earlier today, that the 48-hour directive will become the critical factor in discussions regarding the IGC's progress? Despite its flexibility, the time scale for implementation and the existing derogations, will that issue now take priority over discussions about matters such as the common fisheries policy—which is very important both to my constituents and to those of the right hon. Gentleman? Will the Government delay those important negotiations for something that is not generally opposed throughout the country?

Mr. Lang: First, I should correct the hon. Lady: I ceased to be an honorary vice-president of the European Movement when I ceased to be Secretary of State for Scotland.

On the hon. Lady's question, she may regard it as an unimportant matter, but we believe that it is a fundamental issue that goes to the heart of the Government's economic policy. Because we have achieved flexible labour markets, become more competitive and increased productivity, we have attained the expansion and the growth in our economy that have created falling unemployment for four years, while unemployment has risen in other countries. There are other important issues to be addressed at the intergovernmental conference, but this is the issue that matters to the Government and we intend to insist upon it.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): What value will my right hon. Friend place on opt-outs and agreements reached with our so-called European partners in future? Does he believe that he is dealing with honourable and trustworthy people?

Mr. Lang: I do not think that the European Parliament comes into the equation, except to the extent that there are many Labour Members of the European Parliament. [HON. MEMBERS: "European partners."] I am sorry, I misheard my hon. Friend—which makes it difficult to answer his question.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is it not nothing short of sheer hypocrisy for the Tory Government to say that it is all right for Members of Parliament to have 11 weeks' holiday in the summer, but it is wrong for British workers to have three weeks' paid holiday in a year? As one who opposed the Common Market long before those Johnny-come-latelys on the Tory Benches, I have an idea: if the President of the Board of Trade does not like the Common Market directive, the Government should bring in a Bill tomorrow allowing British workers to have those holidays, and we on the Labour Benches shall push it through in 24 hours. However, I suspect that this lousy, rotten Tory Government are more concerned about the class war than the Common Market.

Mr. Lang: The best way to secure good holidays for British workers is to ensure that they have good, successful, well-paid jobs. There is nothing more damaging to workers' holiday prospects than the possibility of losing their jobs, and that is what would happen if we were to accept the outcome of the directive.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South–West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is a very sad and serious day for Britain? Has not this judgment once more undermined the sovereignty of our Parliament and proved that we cannot rely upon the good faith of our European partners? Is it not time to reintroduce the tactic of non-co-operation, which met with the approval of the entire Tory party when it was last used and was recommended by the former Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), who described it as being a "legitimate tactic within Europe"? Let us use it again and show that we are serious.

Mr. Lang: Let me assure my hon. Friend that we are indeed serious. I agree that the breach of good faith is the most telling aspect of the whole matter, and it is the one that most requires us to react to it.

As for non-co-operation, I believe that the proposition that I have put before the House—that we should go to the intergovernmental conference insisting that the matter be addressed and that our requirements be met—is the right approach. It is a robust, strong, focused and measured approach and it will achieve results.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Does not the Secretary of State understand that the twins of long hours and low pay—they almost inevitably go together—become triplets, with excessive rates of accidents and illness, as a result of working excessive hours? How on earth can he stand at the Dispatch Box and say to people who work in Britain that they must put up with fewer rights than people have anywhere in the rest of Europe?

Mr. Lang: We have health and safety regulations and legislation that require account to be taken of the hazards that workers face in their place of business, and we do not need Europe imposing further regulations on us. The best way of preserving jobs, with people working in secure and safe circumstances, is to have successful, profitable companies run by efficient, reliable employers who take account of the needs of their work force.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Is my right hon. Friend aware that a very large majority of the people of this country, and companies in this country, are sick to death of the decisions of the European Court of political manipulation, which have nothing to do with justice at all or the strength of the case? Bearing that in mind, I ask my right hon. Friend to ignore the decision of the court and not to implement it, but to bring about a change at the IGC, as the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend promised. Surely the House must be sovereign.

Mr. Lang: I agree with many of the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend, but I hope that he will agree

that the House should not seek to disobey the law. We obey the law until we can secure a change in it, and we are determined to secure that change in the law through lawful means.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): If the Government are so genuine in their opposition to the working time directive, can the Secretary of State tell us why the Coal Industry Act 1992, introduced by his Department, provided for the repeal of the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908, which limited hours in the mining industry, to be replaced by the working time directive? Can he say how much other legislation his Department has passed which embraces the working time directive?

Mr. Lang: I am not aware of the details to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but as the working time directive has not yet come into force—it does not come into force until 23 November—I am somewhat sceptical about the point that he makes.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): The President of the Board of Trade will know that I speak as a northern manufacturer. Why does he think that workers in my factory should be obliged to suffer the agonies of European-style unemployment because the 48-hour week has made products in my company uncompetitive? Surely companies have to work when the work is there, not when some unelected Commissioner says that it is there. Is not the darkest irony the fact that yesterday we all paid tribute to those who gave their lives in two world wars so that we might govern ourselves, yet today we find ourselves at the mercy and diktat of foreign courts?

Mr. Lang: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that it is quite unacceptable that the Commission should decide in Brussels what the working conditions should be in this country, which are properly the preserve of this country and should be negotiated at the workplace by employers and employees.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does not the President of the Board of Trade accept that people will be astounded that the Government's key priority in the IGC at the moment is not to sort out the BSE problem or to help the fishermen; it is based on preventing people from having an entitlement to holidays, or on unscrupulous employers being able to insist on people working more than 48 hours a week? Is not the argument about competitiveness with the countries of south-east Asia totally spurious? Are we now basing the social policy of the United Kingdom on the child labour regimes of those countries? Is not that totally unacceptable?

Mr. Lang: There are many important issues to be discussed at the IGC, but this one is fundamental. We believe that there has been a breach of good faith, which has destroyed the impact of the opt-out that we achieved on the social chapter. We accepted in good faith the undertakings given by the other members of the European Union.

We regard this matter as extremely important. For the hon. Gentleman to suggest that competitiveness with the countries of south-east Asia is irrelevant shows how out of touch he is, because it is extremely important for us to be competitive on a global basis. The global competitiveness that this country has achieved has been the secret of rising employment, falling unemployment and economic success.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North–West Norfolk): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many large companies in west Norfolk already offer excellent pay and conditions, which are far better than those envisaged by the directive? They regard it as a gross insult to be lectured to by the European Court. Is he also aware that a number of small firms in the tourist and leisure industry in west Norfolk will lose out because of the directive, and will probably have to make people redundant? What message does he have for those small firms?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right. Organisations that represent small businesses have made it clear that they believe that the directive will damage their members' interests. Burdens will undoubtedly be imposed—not least the bureaucratic burdens of compiling and maintaining records—which will add substantially to the costs of small businesses, and will cost jobs.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North–East): Does not the Minister use the techniques of cant and hypocrisy when he says that employers and employees should be free to reach agreements? In the past 17 years, the Government have emasculated the trade unions, and created an imbalance of power in companies. The agreements—purely as they are—would have been met years ago if properly prepared and constructed trade unions had enjoyed the confidence of the Government. Instead of that, the Government take a 19th-century view of working conditions. It is appropriate to meet that with a 19th-century quotation: "The Conservatives will do everything possible to help the workers, except get off their backs."

Mr. Lang: There speaks the voice of old Labour. The Government's industrial relations legislation has created a rule of law that did not previously exist, and has introduced democracy into the trade union movement. As a consequence, members of trade unions have had better-paid jobs and better working conditions than they had before.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the contortions through which our so-called partners have gone to produce this result show how shabby they have been, even by their standards? Does that not also show that, after 25 years of membership, the terms on which we are in Europe are unacceptable as a basis of our membership for the next 25 years? Is not the lesson to be learnt from this dreadful business today that we should renegotiate an arrangement with Europe that fits in with the way in which we do things and with the way in which they do things, and that to go on like this is frankly unacceptable?

Mr. Lang: What is particularly unacceptable is that, after we had renegotiated the basis on which our social legislation relationship with Europe is secured, that was undermined by the devious ploy of using article 118A of

[Mr. Lang]

the treaty, for which the directive was never intended, thereby circumventing the deal that had already been reached with us.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Although in the past I have voiced serious reservations about decisions taken by the European supreme court, as a former shipyard worker, I welcome the judgment. Unlike my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), I do not trust the House or the Government to protect the interests of the millions of underpaid and overworked employees. Will the Secretary of State confirm that an individual employee or group of employees will have the right to seek a redress of grievance against unscrupulous employers in our national courts?

Mr. Lang: Our existing health and safety regulations protect the interests of shipyard employees. Employees already have recourse to the courts if those regulations are breached. Our objection to the directive and to the outcome of the judgment is that Europe is seeking to override our national arrangements, and to impose arrangements of its own that we consider to be unsuitable for this country.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): My right hon. Friend will be aware that Conservative Members are wholly united behind the Prime Minister in his determination to reverse the judgment. Given that, does my right hon. Friend agree that the real problem with the social chapter opt-out lies in the fact that the other provisions—some eight in number—already exist in the main body of the treaty? Future provisions—which my right hon. Friend knows are coming—will be driven through that route.

Does my right hon. Friend agree, therefore, that at the intergovernmental conference, rather than simply trying to reverse the judgment, we should say that a marketplace cannot possibly work if we try to centralise social provision as well? It is time for us to extend the opt-out to the provisions in the treaty that are covered, including health and safety provisions. Let us go ahead and do that now.

Mr. Lang: I agree with my hon. Friend's assessment, and I think that the social opt-out secured by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at Maastricht would have gained his objective, had it been honoured. It is because it has not been honoured as a result of this action that we are having to readdress the issue, in the most forthright terms.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Does not the right hon. Gentleman accept that what he has said this afternoon will be seen as cant and hypocrisy by many people? Over the past 17 years, this Government have waged war against organised labour. If the right hon. Gentleman is indeed suggesting that all employers are acting humanely, he should revisit the Liverpool docks, and many other industries in which there has been a return to casual labour. He should consider the ending of the mining industry. The Government should enter the world of realities, and face up to the fact that they have given us a load of cant and hypocrisy and are continuing the fight against organised labour.

Mr. Lang: The best way in which we can help labour, organised or disorganised, is to create more jobs. In the past three years, more than 150,000 new manufacturing jobs have been created in this country. I commend to the hon. Gentleman the view of the president of the BDI, the German industry federation, who said:

"We have too rigid labour laws"—

he was talking about Germany—

"We have too high social costs and taxes. We work the shortest week in Europe. The German Government spends 50 per cent. of GDP, as opposed to 42 per cent. in Britain. No wonder we have a problem."

Germany does have a problem, and we are keen not to have that problem here.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): My right hon. Friend has said that we must obey the law, but the law is quite clear. It is in article 18 of the Single European Act, which states that

"the rights and interests of employed persons"

should be decided by unanimity. The law has been fraudulently applied by institutions with a defined agenda—an agenda against the United Kingdom. Where is the consent for this law? If there is no consent, why should we obey it?

Mr. Lang: Because the European Court of Justice has delivered a judgment that we are treaty bound to accept. Therefore, we must seek to have that judgment reversed by negotiation with the other partners of the European Union. That is our firm intention.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Given that, for the Government, this is a matter of firm principle, what concessions were made by other nations to persuade us to abstain?

Mr. Lang: We are not in the territory of talking about concessions; we are in the territory of insisting on the principle of what was agreed in the social chapter opt-out being met in practice, and that is the message that we shall take to the IGC.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Is not this episode all the more tragic for having been predicted for so long—during Maastricht debates, and for many months, even years, thereafter? Can my right hon. Friend give the House any assurance whatever that we are not just going to talk tough and then have the directive imposed on us? In the public sector, will it not be applicable from 23 November?

Can my right hon. Friend list any sanctions that could bring about the unanimity that is required to change the treaty? Will we be, for example, exercising the right of the empty chair, like de Gaulle? Will we be cutting off contributions? What positive measures will be taken to concentrate these people's minds, and to bring about the changes that we require?

Mr. Lang: I contemplate neither of the measures that my hon. Friend has suggested. Let me make it clear to

him, however, that many matters are being discussed at the IGC, on which our European partners are extremely keen to make progress. They will not make progress on any of them unless and until we have this matter dealt with.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Does not the President of the Board of Trade recognise the Government's responsibility in regard to employees who are in a weak bargaining position and who work for bad employers? How can he justify his position against that background?

Mr. Lang: I believe that the best interest of employers and employees in this country is served by maintaining light burdens on companies and their work forces, and by ensuring that we retain the advantage of the competitive, flexible labour market that we have achieved. That is the best prospect for our national economic prosperity, and for the interests of employees.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Will my right hon. Friend clarify what he means by the law? If Parliament chose to pass an Act that empowered Ministers to defy the directive, would he seek to defy the will of Parliament? Does not that exemplify how the Government have the option to come to Parliament to seek powers to defy the directive, in the event of a stalemate at the intergovernmental conference in which case the directive would stand?

Mr. Lang: It is this Parliament that has accepted the European Court's jurisdiction in the matter. The court's judgment has gone against us and we must now seek to reverse it by persuading our European partners to agree that the spirit of our social chapter opt-out should be honoured.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): May I ask the Secretary of State a technical question? From the date when the directive is triggered, will not people have recourse to industrial tribunals in the United Kingdom, which will find in their favour in terms of entitlement to annual leave, for example? Whatever our views in the House, therefore, is not there an immediate problem that requires legislation, otherwise not only will legislation be handed down to us by European judges, but our own judges will have to interpret and make decisions in the absence of a decision by the House? Will not industrial tribunals have to find in favour of workers—and I welcome that—with almost immediate effect?

Mr. Lang: As from 23 November this year, public sector employees will be covered by the directive's terms. We shall be consulting the private sector on the implementation of the directive, until we are able to have the law changed. Once we have completed that consultation, we shall present legislation to Parliament.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): This is about not the demerits or merits of the 48-hour directive, but the principle that we had an opt-out from that directive and that, by double dealing, cheating and twisting, faceless bureaucrats and their friends in the courts are now foisting the directive on Britain. What faith can we have, therefore, in future and current negotiations with the European Community? Will my right hon. Friend ensure that his consultations will be detailed and sufficiently lengthy to enable him to visit every business in my constituency? Thus he could ensure that, before the directive is imposed on Britain, he could listen to what my business people have to say about its imposition and the effect on their businesses.

Mr. Lang: I can assure my hon. Friend that we shall have to ensure that the basis on which the position is dealt with is completely watertight and will ensure that our interests are fully protected for the future. I intend that the consultation should be long enough to ensure that we take on board all the concerns of industry, large and small, and react to it.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Given that today's judgment was entirely predictable, will the President of the Board of Trade answer the question that was asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) and tell us how much the judgment and the case have cost the British taxpayer?

Mr. Lang: The cost of the legal case at the court was, I believe, about £50,000.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): Does it not ill behove European economies—which are loser economies, where unemployment is going up—to dictate to us how we should run our own affairs? Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in the United States of America, where unemployment is falling, as it is in the UK, on average, holidays are fewer and people work longer hours than in the UK? At the end of the very long day, is not the UK's future exemplified by the White Paper that he published yesterday, which talks about a global vision?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He recognises that we must compete with countries not just in Europe, but worldwide. There is clear evidence from the unemployment trend and from the growth of respective economies that the UK's solution of having flexible labour markets and of lightening the burden on employers is the best way to provide secure, lasting and prosperous jobs.

Mrs. Beckett: The Secretary of State quoted from Professor Harrington's report and said that it justified the Government's claim that this is not a health and safety matter. As Professor Harrington seems not to be aware of that, and as the report has not been published, will the Secretary of State undertake to publish it so that the House can come to its own conclusions?

Mr. Lang: I have no doubt that the report, which was submitted as part of the case to the court, will now be available and I shall give careful consideration to the right hon. Lady's request.

Point of Order

4.24 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. On 7 November, I put to the Deputy Prime Minister a point concerning the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris). It has been drawn to my attention that what I said implied that the hon. Gentleman had behaved in an improper manner in his relationship with Capital City Bus—in particular, that he had been accepted a seat on the board of a company that he had been responsible for privatising. Unfortunately, I had been misinformed about the matter—*[Interruption.]* I now accept—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Listen to the hon. Gentleman when he is speaking to the House.

Mr. Bayley: I now accept that the company had never been in the public sector and I therefore wish to apologise to the hon. Member for Epping Forest and the House.

Madam Speaker: Statements such as that should be listened to in silence, not heckled. I deprecate very much what took place during that statement.

Working Time Directive

4.26 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, to debate an important matter that requires specific and urgent consideration, namely,

"the judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Communities concerning the application of the United Kingdom in respect of the working time directive."

One of the factors in the Standing Order is urgency. The directive will become law in this country next week. Unless we have a debate under the Standing Order procedure, it is unlikely that any debate will be held, yet at the same time the subject will no doubt be extensively covered in the media, with comment on radio and television and discussion and debate outside the Chamber.

We must clarify the issues because, as the Secretary of State half agreed, there is no chapter in the Maastricht treaty; nor is the opt-out relevant because article 118A applies. This case shows that its scope has been increased, so the increased qualified majority vote influence will be greater in future.

Unless we debate this matter—which has not been debated at all in this Chamber, merely in Standing Committee some three years ago—the merits of the law will not be considered, its effects will not be debated and the effects on tribunals, mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), will not be properly explored. The rights of employers and employees will be, at least, uncertain.

It is not a question of replacing tomorrow's business with an Adjournment debate. As I understand it, such a debate would be given precedence over the bovine spongiform encephalopathy debate, which perhaps should have been more thoroughly discussed previously.

The public expect us to debate the working time directive—and to sit for an additional three hours—as it concerns vital matters relating to their employment and to the rights of employees. There is no likelihood of the matter being debated, even on the Adjournment for three hours, unless you, Madam Speaker, accept my application.

Madam Speaker: I have listened very carefully to what the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) has said and I must give my decision without giving my reasons. I am afraid that I do not consider that the matter that he raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20 and I cannot therefore submit his application to the House.

Orders of the Day

Firearms (Amendment) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.28 pm

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Biffen). With the exception of speeches by Front Benchers, I am afraid that speeches wil be limited to 10 minutes.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Could you help the House with regard to motion No. 2 on the Order Paper? It is not exactly a wholly new precedent, but I believe that it is the first time that such procedure has been challenged in the House.

I read motion No. 2 under the heading "Business of the House" and like, I suspect, many of my colleagues I said to myself, "That's a guillotine motion." I made inquiries and was told that it was not a guillotine motion in the form that we have come to know and use over the 32 years that I have been in the House.

Apparently, the motion—I do not know how many hon. Members can read it and argue that it is not a guillotine motion—is not debatable, and a decision will be taken forthwith. In contrast, a normal guillotine motion can be debated for three hours, or—if my memory serves correctly—an hour and a half if it is a supplementary motion.

There are two issues, the first of which is whether the motion is suitable for dealing with clauses 1 to 5 of the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, although I shall not attempt to deal with it now.

My second concern is about the procedure, which has been used once before, in the summer, when no one spotted it and the motion went through on the nod. The matter has been drawn to my attention principally by my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J.Wiggin), who asked me what I thought the second item on the Order Paper meant. I said, "It's a guillotine motion."

You, Madam Speaker, will know that many decades ago, and with great reluctance, the House had to adopt the guillotine procedure. By its very nature, the procedure removes the rights of the Opposition and of minorities by truncating debate. The safeguard, as I have always understood it, was a three-hour debate on guillotine motions or a one-and-a-half-hour debate on amendments to those motions. We are now being presented with the first new procedure, in my memory, allowing a guillotine motion to be moved and passed without debate. It is a deplorable and thoroughly retrograde step for the House to be landed with this procedure, without any warning, discussion or decision being made by it.

I am appalled that the Government should have decided to introduce a guillotine in such a back-door manner. I hope that Ministers will tell us that they will not move motion No. 2, that we will have no more of the new procedure and that we shall proceed with the established guillotine procedure to which we have become so accustomed.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I think that I require no further instruction on this matter. I am sure that the House is quite aware of the sentiments—*[Interruption.]* No; there will be no further points of order on this matter. I can see that hon. Members are concerned about the matter, but they do not have to continue expressing their concern. The Government have placed the motion on the Order Paper, and hon. Members can interpret it as they wish.

A precedent was set during the passage of the Family Law Act 1996. I wonder whether the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) realises that, today, the motion will fall if the voice of only one hon. Member is raised in objection. At the appropriate time, hon. Members will merely have to say "object", unless the Government withdraw the motion. When the time comes, I am sure that at least one hon. Member will say "object", which will meet the right hon. Gentleman's concern. Perhaps we can now proceed.

4.32 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Nine months ago, Thomas Hamilton walked into Dunblane primary school carrying four high-calibre handguns and 743 rounds of ammunition. Within minutes, he had killed 16 young children and their teacher. The dreadful crimes committed that day were committed with weapons that were legally bought and legally held. Those facts placed an onerous duty on the Government to consider what controls there should be on the ownership and possession of guns.

Lord Cullen was asked to conduct an inquiry. His report, and the Government's response to it, were published last month. The Government intend to implement all 23 of the recommendations on firearms made by Lord Cullen. The nine recommendations that require legislation are taken forward in the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, and the remainder will be taken forward administratively.

Lord Cullen made no recommendations on the central question of access to handguns, but he considered that access to handguns should be strictly controlled because of the special dangers that they pose. He made two alternative suggestions to achieve that objective. The Government agree with Lord Cullen's objective, but propose to achieve it in a somewhat different manner. Let me explain why.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): When dealing with what Lord Cullen said—or, rather, what he did not say—I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend will add that Lord Cullen did not consider that the banning of handguns for target shooting or the banning of shooting

[Mr. John Carlisle]

clubs would be justified. As my right hon. and learned Friend has said, that is the crux of the Bill. Why, then, has he gone beyond what Lord Cullen recommended?

Mr. Howard: My last words before giving way to my hon. Friend were "Let me explain why." I am about to explain why the Government have chosen the course of action that we are putting before the House.

Lord Cullen would have allowed single-shot handguns to continue to be kept at home. The Government do not believe that handguns, whatever their calibre, should be kept at home. Handguns are not used to shoot game and, as Lord Cullen observed and Thomas Hamilton demonstrated, they are extremely easy to carry and to conceal. Of course it is true that most gun-related crimes are committed with illegally held weapons. That is why we have increased the maximum penalties for illegal possession of a firearm and for going to a crime equipped with a gun. It would be difficult to argue that the public would get no extra protection from a ban on handguns in the home.

Lord Cullen suggested that multi-shot handguns, too, should—

Mr. Marlow: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Howard: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I should like to complete my explanation.

Lord Cullen suggested that multi-shot handguns, too, should be kept at home if—and only if—they could be safely disabled. He suggested that that could be done by removing the slide assembly or the cylinder, which would then be left in a gun club, or by fitting a locked barrel block to the gun. He suggested that the individual ownership of multi-shot handguns should be banned if that option proved unworkable. Instead, licensed gun clubs would own and keep them for use by their members.

The Government took advice from the Forensic Science Service on the practicability of disabling multi-shot handguns. It concluded that that way forward was unworkable. Existing barrel blocks are currently commercially available only for certain types of shotgun; they are not suitable for handguns. Even if such blocks became more widely available, it would be impossible to guarantee that they could not be removed by someone with enough determination.

As to removing parts from handguns to disable them, it would be impossible to ensure that someone did not keep illicit spares at home. While it is true that the slide or cylinder can be removed from many handguns easily, it is not universally the case. As Lord Cullen conceded in the case of many high-precision .22 handguns:

> "Repeated disassembly involved disruption of carefully tuned components and would very quickly impair the accuracy for which they were designed".

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): Does not my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the forensic evidence that he has been given is in total contrast to that which Lord Cullen accepted? The report says:

> "In the light of the evidence of Mr. Paton and Mr. Penn I am satisfied that the dismantling of self-loading pistols and revolvers would in general be practicable."

Referring later to fitting barrel blocks, Lord Cullen said:

> "There was little doubt that it would be possible for them to be manufactured. Such blocks were already available for shot guns to prevent third parties using the gun."

Mr. Paton was in no doubt that it would be simple for them to be made. Why did not my right hon. and learned Friend accept that evidence rather than that of the Forensic Science Service?

Mr. Howard: The fact remains that those blocks have not been manufactured for handguns. Lord Cullen reached his conclusion on the basis of the evidence of two experts at his inquiry. We have consulted the Forensic Science Service and have reached a different conclusion on the practicability of the way forward.

Mr. Marlow: My right hon. and learned Friend has said that the vast majority of crimes carried out with weapons involve those that are not to be banned or illegally held weapons. He will be aware that the people whom we are seeking to protect the public from will continue to get their weapons illegally. Politics is about priorities. Will my right hon. and learned Friend say how many lives he thinks that his measures will save, what they will cost and how many lives could be saved if that money were spent on the health service?

Mr. Howard: I do not suppose that my hon. Friend seriously expected me to give a quantified estimate along those lines. However, the Government cannot abdicate their responsibility or shirk the duty that the dreadful events of Dunblane placed upon them. Therefore, it is right that the Government should face up to that duty, examine the issues involved and reach their conclusions on how the objectives that Lord Cullen set out can best be achieved. That is the basis of the proposals in the Bill.

Sir Cranley Onslow (Woking): Is my right hon. and learned Friend prepared to put in the Library of the House a copy of the response that he received from the Forensic Science Service on the important issue of dismantling?

Mr. Howard: I am certainly prepared to do that.

Mr. Paul Marland (West Gloucestershire): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that there is considerable concern about the Bill in my constituency? First, will he confirm for clarification that, as a result of the Bill, the 57,000 law-abiding full-bore pistol shots will be denied their sport for ever? Secondly, if .22 handguns can be kept safely in gun clubs, why is it impossible to keep full-bore pistols in the same manner?

Mr. Howard: I shall return to that point later. It is an important point that merits a reply, and I shall certainly provide one in due course.

I now turn to Lord Cullen's alternative suggestion. Despite the evidence that was placed before him, he recognised that his preferred way forward might not prove practicable. His alternative suggestion was that the individual ownership of all multi-shot handguns should be banned. If we accept the case for allowing some handguns to be kept in licensed clubs, as Lord Cullen did, individual target shooters should be free to continue to own them. Indeed, competitive target shooting would not be viable unless those taking part could use their own guns.

The Government therefore decided to adopt a different approach that draws a distinction between low-calibre and high-calibre handguns.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): Does the Home Secretary accept that the serious elements within the gun lobby—those competing at the highest level—insist that it will be impossible to achieve the level of accomplishment necessary to compete in the Olympics if they can no longer take their guns back to their homes? Therefore, the argument that the Home Secretary chooses to advance, which suggests that, somehow, the Bill will accommodate the highest standards of gunshooting, is fallacious. He is offering an empty gesture to serious shooters. I oppose the possession of handguns, but my constituents who have reached the highest levels of accomplishment and have participated in Olympic tournaments tell me that they will be unable to continue to compete if they cannot carry their guns home with them to calibrate them, cosset them and do whatever else they do with them. If the Home Secretary cannot provide for that, the Bill is sheer hypocrisy as it does not protect serious shooters.

Mr. Howard: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's argument. The Bill may make it more difficult for the competitive shooters to whom the hon. Gentleman refers to continue their activities in precisely the way in which they have until now. There will be differences. The ban on handguns in the home means that, inevitably, there will be differences, but I believe that competitive shooters will adapt to the regime for which the Bill provides and will continue to practise their sporting activity.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Home Secretary realises that the issue raises strong feelings. Therefore, will he answer the question that the Prime Minister failed to answer this afternoon and say why the Government adopt contrasting attitudes to corporal punishment in English schools and the possession of handguns? How can they consider corporal punishment in schools to be a matter of individual conscience, but adopt a different approach to the possession of handguns?

Mr. Howard: Contrary to the hon. Gentleman's assertion, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister replied to that question this afternoon. He made it quite clear that the Government have reached a considered view on the matter. As is normal practice, and as occurred in 1988 after the massacre at Hungerford, the Government present their considered conclusions to the House and expect members of the Conservative parliamentary party to support those conclusions.

As Lord Cullen said, higher-calibre handguns are not target guns in the true and original sense. Many have been developed by the police and the military for self-defence. Their wider use has encouraged some shooters to don the trappings of combat, such as camouflage clothing. In Lord Cullen's words, that has

"caused others to feel uneasy about what appears to be the use of guns as symbols of personal power".

Indeed, target shooting with high-calibre handguns has been removed as a sport from the Olympic games precisely because, as I understand it, those guns are recognised to be more dangerous.

In addition, the power of a .22 rimfire cartridge is limited by a special design. It is constructed of thin metal to enable the rim to be crushed when hit by the firing pin. A .22 rimfire handgun is between four and six times less powerful than a typical full-calibre handgun.

Clause 1 will therefore outlaw all higher-calibre handguns of the sort used by Thomas Hamilton. The ownership and use of lower-calibre handguns will be allowed provided that they are kept under safe lock and key in secure gun clubs at all times.

I know that some hon. Members believe that the Bill should go further and ban all handguns completely. However, I believe that we can give the public the protection that they deserve and allow target shooting with lower-calibre handguns—which has always been an Olympic sport—to continue. Indeed, I believe that banning all handguns could drive some target shooters underground. That might mean that the public would have less protection than would be available under the Bill.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Howard: The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) shakes his head, but only last week the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) acknowledged the importance of that argument.

Sir Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Has my right hon. and learned Friend considered the fact that .32 centrefire handguns are used for competitions in the Commonwealth games? Will guns of that calibre continue to be used in the Commonwealth games under his proposal?

Mr. Howard: It is true that .32 calibre guns are used in competitions in the Commonwealth games, but not in the Olympic games. It will be for the Government and the city of Manchester, which decides which events will be part of the Commonwealth games in 2002, to discuss whether that higher-calibre event should be permitted. Should that event be permitted, it will be possible under the Bill to allow the event to take place.

Sir Anthony Grant (South-West Cambridgeshire): Will my right hon. and learned Friend say a word about vintage arms? He will be aware that there is a highly respectable vintage arms society, of which I am a member. It caters for muzzle-loading weapons, which could not conceivably be used to commit an appalling crime but which do not appear to be exempted from the Bill.

Mr. Howard: I understand the concerns of my hon. Friend and many others. I shall turn to that point in a moment and I may have some modestly encouraging news for him.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): A moment ago, the Home Secretary said that I had acknowledged the argument that a complete ban on handguns would drive underground an activity that could then be conducted without safeguards for security. I did indeed acknowledge that argument, but he should also accept that I said that

"the more I consider the case for allowing .22 pistols to continue to be licensed, the flimsier I find it."—[*Official Report*, 28 October 1996; Vol. 284, c. 348.]

[Mr. Jack Straw]

I understand the argument about which he is concerned, but is not the point that there will still be every opportunity for shooting enthusiasts to take part in lawful, licensed shooting activities, either with rifles or shotguns? There is no question of driving such people underground.

Mr. Howard: I was not claiming the hon. Gentleman as a convert to my cause. Indeed, I am not certain how much good it would have done my cause had I done so. I was merely making the strictly limited point that, in a radio broadcast with me last week, he acknowledged the importance of the point that I have been making: that a total ban on the use of handguns might drive some target shooters underground, which might mean that the public had less protection than would be available under the Bill. That is an important point and the hon. Gentleman shared that view last week.

The Bill will take out of circulation entirely the most dangerous high-calibre weapons that were lawfully held by Thomas Hamilton. As a result, 160,000 high-calibre handguns will be destroyed—80 per cent. of those legally held in England and Wales. The Association of Chief Police Officers has welcomed the proposals. It said:

"The proposed ban on high calibre handguns and the tightening up on firearms controls generally will provide significant improvement . . . in public protection. ACPO's measured view suggested retaining a strictly controlled ability for handgun competition, limited to .22 weapons, and we very much support both that proposal and the proposed requirements for comprehensive security measures over weapons stored at gun clubs".

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Is it not a fact that Thomas Hamilton should never have been allowed access to handguns? Is it not a fact that the police failed in their job? Is it not a fact that, far from supporting a total ban, Lord Cullen suggests that the police should regularise their own arrangements for scrutiny of applicants and that the law should have been looked at to ensure that the weight of evidence lay in favour of police objections to Hamilton's case rather than in favour of the applicant? Would not that be simpler?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend will be aware that many of the 23 recommendations made by Lord Cullen in his report—all of which we accept—go to precisely the point that he has just made. Of course it is true that there is room for reform of the procedures. The Bill proposes the implementation of the recommendations that will achieve that objective. Lord Cullen went on to say, however, that that in itself was not enough and that consideration had to be given to controlling access to handguns, which has given rise to the proposals in the Bill in addition to those dealing with certification.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Did it not become apparent in the Cullen inquiry that part of the problem over Hamilton's possession of weapons was that police forces throughout England, Wales and Scotland were not using a common inquiry form? The law was not being equally applied in separate parts of the United Kingdom by various police forces. Is the Home Secretary able to assure the House that as a result of the Bill the police will use a common inquiry form that will range wider and uniformly collect all the information that they require to make a sensible judgment on applications for licences?

Mr. Howard: I agree that consistency of approach along the lines that the hon. Gentleman has suggested would be desirable. That will indeed occur in future.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I have not yet given way to anyone from the hon. Gentleman's party, so it is right that I should do so before I make further progress.

Mr. Ross: Did I understand the Home Secretary correctly a few minutes ago when he was quoting from advice that he was given by the chief constables to the effect that, if the number of legal firearms were reduced, there would be a considerable reduction in armed crime? Surely that implies that chief constables believe that licensed guns are used in armed crime. That is manifestly untrue. Only illegal weapons are used in armed crime.

Mr. Howard: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman is right. ACPO is, perhaps, in a better position than—dare I say it?—either the hon. Gentleman or I to know what weapons are used in the commission of armed crime. I am certainly prepared to accept that the vast majority of armed crimes are committed with illegally held weapons, but in the face of such opinions I for one would not exclude the possibility—perhaps the probability—that some legally held weapons are also so used.

Mr. Winston Churchill (Davyhulme): What evidence does my right hon. and learned Friend have in respect of his reply to the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross)? What figures does he have at his disposal to show that legally held weapons have been used in the commission of armed crime? What are the statistics? Furthermore, bearing in mind the fact that the overwhelming majority of people who own firearms legally are upright, respected members of the community, by what right are the Government and the House about to dispossess them of their property without full compensation not only for the firearm but for all the equipment that goes with it? Many such firearm owners will be severely out of pocket.

Mr. Howard: I shall come to compensation in a moment. I cannot give my hon. Friend precise figures along the lines that he requests, but I remind the House—it is important that we do not lose sight of this—that the genesis of this legislation was one appalling incident in which 17 murders were committed with lawfully held weapons. When we consider the use of legally held weapons in the commission of crime, it is not possible to overlook that dreadful event.

Clauses 2 to 5 provide for a number of essential but strictly limited exemptions. Certain professionals, such as vets, hunt servants and those working in slaughterhouses, need high-calibre handguns to destroy animals humanely, and they will be exempt. Equally, some types of pistol need to be exempt. They will include starting pistols, flare pistols and trophies of war acquired before 1946.

As I made clear to the House in my statement on Lord Cullen's report, the Government want to put these measures on the statute book at the earliest possible

opportunity. I propose, therefore, that clauses 1 to 5 be taken on the Floor of the House next week in order to make immediate progress. The remaining clauses will be taken in Standing Committee in the usual way.

Clauses 6 and 7 will require the owners of low-calibre handguns to be members of a licensed pistol club. They will have to keep their pistol at that club and will be able to use it only for target shooting. It will be an offence to possess a low-calibre handgun outside a licensed pistol club. The maximum penalty will be 10 years in prison, an unlimited fine, or both. Transitional arrangements will require those who have a low-calibre handgun to surrender it until they are able to find a licensed handgun club in which to store it.

I accept that there will be circumstances in which low-calibre handguns have to be moved from licensed pistol clubs—for example, when a gun needs mending or its owner is competing in a national target shooting competition at a different club. Clause 8 contains the provisions governing such moves. Before a gun can be removed, a permit will be required from the police and the gun will need to be carried by a third party whom the police are satisfied is a fit and proper person to discharge that responsibility.

Since the Bill was published on 1 November, the Government have been reflecting on the question of compensation that should be paid to those who are affected adversely by its provisions. I have met parliamentary colleagues on a number of occasions. I have also met representatives of various organisations and received letters from individuals who will be affected by the legislation.

It has always been the Government's position that they must pay compensation to those to whom they have a legal obligation. Since the Bill was published, the Government have received further legal advice from the Law Officers, which makes it clear that not only do we have an obligation to those whose guns will be made unlawful by the Bill but that our obligations also extend to those who own accessories that can be used only in connection with those guns. In those circumstances, I intend to enter into discussions with the British Shooting Sports Council to identify the accessories that fall within the terms of the further legal advice that we have received. The Government will introduce proposals to implement that legal advice. That clearly means that a revised money resolution will be necessary and the Government intend to table one shortly. In considering the precise scope of that resolution, we shall take into account the points that will no doubt be made in today's debate.

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): Obviously, the change will be some improvement, although the fact that it is necessary to make a change reflects the rush with which the legislation has been introduced. Whatever view one may take about complete or revised bans, is it not clear that it would be grossly unjust if the money resolution did not cover people who have businesses—for example, shooting ranges with long leases—that will no longer receive any revenue? They are likely to go bankrupt, as are many other businesses associated with the sport. Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure us that the money resolution will cover such people so that the House can debate the point? Otherwise the amended resolution will also be, in common justice, unacceptable.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend is unaware of the precise terms of the revised resolution. I cannot give him the total assurance that he requests, but I have said—I hope that he will take comfort from it—that in deciding the precise scope of the revised money resolution we shall take full account of points made in the debate today, including the point that he has just made.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Are we to understand from the Home Secretary's statement that the money resolution currently before the House is being withdrawn? Otherwise we could be in a state of some confusion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Decisions on that are not a matter for the Chair, but I imagine that the Home Secretary will clarify that point.

Mr. Howard: The money resolution before the House will not be moved and I have indicated that a revised money resolution will be introduced shortly.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): When my right hon. and learned Friend considers businesses of the sort mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), will he also pay special attention to businesses that are legitimately involved in selling arms—for example, Helston Gunsmiths in my constituency, which has written to almost every hon. Member? Will he take fully into account compensation for the stock of weapons and accessories that such businesses hold and for loss of trade?

Mr. Howard: There is a distinction between the two categories that my hon. Friend has identified and it is important that that distinction is clarified. Stocks of weapons that will become unlawful as a result of the legislation will be the subject of valid compensation. The position of a dealer in firearms or a manufacturer of firearms will be no different from that of an individual holder of firearms. Holders of firearms that will be made unlawful by this legislation will all be entitled to compensation for the weapons they own, but that is different—I would be wrong not to draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) to the distinction—from claims for compensation for loss of trade and business. So far as I am aware, there is no precedent for such claims and I would arouse false hopes and expectations if I were to give my right hon. and hon. Friends any comfort on that point. There is a clear distinction between the two.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): When my right hon. and learned Friend reconsiders the money resolution, I hope that he will consult clubs. He must acknowledge that the banning of large-calibre pistols will result in many clubs folding. They will not be viable if large-calibre guns cannot be used. Therefore, will he consider carefully the possibility of compensation for clubs? I am told that 90 per cent. of clubs are likely to

[Mr. Michael Colvin]

close and that they will lose, on average, about £8,000 or £9,000 each. If he reconsiders the money resolution, he should bear those facts in mind.

Mr. Howard: I am afraid that the same points apply to that category as to the category that I was just describing, but—as I said earlier—all the points made in today's debate will be taken into account in framing the revised money resolution and deciding on its precise scale.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I understand that compensation of about £150 per handgun was contemplated by the Government. I visited my local gun club last Friday and the first estimate, with documentation, that was produced by one of my constituents was for compensation of £2,000. Will my right hon. and learned Friend give his best estimate now of the amount of compensation that will be required, and is that the best use of public money?

Mr. Howard: The financial memorandum deals with that point. On the basis of the present money resolution, the best estimate that we could make of the compensation bill was between £25 million and £50 million. Clearly, if we revise the money resolution and extend the categories of compensation, the bill will be greater.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle) *rose—*

Mr. Michael Lord (Central Suffolk) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), who was on his feet first, after which I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk (Mr. Lord). I must then make progress.

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. and learned Friend quotes precedent, which I accept, for a Government not compensating businesses that fold as a result of Government decisions. He has set his mind against that, but did I understand him rightly when he said, in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), that he has not ruled out compensating the members of gun clubs? As I understand it, there is no precedent that requires the Government to ignore the plight of ordinary members of the public who come together, with limited means, to create clubs—most of which will now have to close. The cost to the public purse, unlike that of compensating businesses, would be limited and may be about £8,000 or £9,000, as we have heard. Will my right hon. and learned Friend at least consider that point and not rule it out today?

Mr. Howard: I am afraid that that point comes into the same category as those to which I have previously responded. Depending on the scope of the money resolution—I know that my hon. Friend will have taken careful note of what I said on that—those matters may be able to be considered in greater detail at a later stage in the consideration of the Bill.

Mr. Lord: I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend is taking note of the feeling of the House on the question of compensation. If people undertake a legal activity, it is wrong to take away their legally held property without adequately compensating them. Like many other hon. Members, I discussed the subject with constituents at the weekend. One gentleman showed me documented evidence that his handguns and accessories were worth just under £4,000. I asked him how many members of his club had similar handguns and he said that there were 100, so there are handguns worth nearly £500,000 in one club in Suffolk. I trust that when my right hon. and learned Friend is doing his sums on compensation, he will ensure that he allows enough to compensate everybody adequately.

Mr. Howard: I have repeatedly made it clear that the owners of weapons rendered unlawful by the Bill will be compensated at market value for their guns.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I am sorry, but I must make a little more progress.

Part II of the Bill deals with the arrangements for the new pistol clubs that must be licensed by the Secretary of State before target handgun shooting may be allowed. Before being granted a licence, clubs will need to demonstrate that they meet detailed criteria, especially in relation to security. We shall publish those criteria. The police and other interested parties are currently being consulted on the details.

The new clubs will have to conform to the published criteria during the term of their licences. They will need to keep registers of the guns that are stored there, and to record when the guns are removed from and returned to the club on a permit. Police officers and police civilian staff will have the power to enter and inspect a club's premises to ensure that the provisions of the legislation, and conditions on the licence, are being met. If the conditions are not met, or if there are other concerns about public safety, I, or the Secretary of State for Scotland, will have the power to revoke a club's licence.

Part III introduces new regulatory requirements and prohibits both mail order sales and expanding ammunition, except for the purposes of lawfully shooting deer and of vermin control.

Certificate holders will be required to notify the police about the destruction of firearms listed on their certificates, or of transactions involving those firearms. Those arrangements will apply equally to rifles and shotguns, and will enable the police to keep a closer watch on the destination of legally held firearms.

The Bill implements Lord Cullen's recommendation that applications for firearm certificates should be accompanied by the names and addresses of two referees. The referees may be required to provide details of the applicant in a structured questionnaire, as prescribed in rules.

For an applicant seeking to renew his firearm certificate, one referee must be from an official of a licensed gun club. Firearm certificates granted for rifles for target shooting will be subject to a condition that the holder must belong to at least one approved club. That implements another of Lord Cullen's recommendations. Those steps will provide the police with more background evidence about the applicant than is currently available from the present single counter-signatory.

The procedures for obtaining and granting firearm certificates will be strengthened. Lord Cullen drew attention to an apparent mismatch in the present legislation between the granting of firearms certificates and their revocation. The emphasis of the present legislation will be altered, so that the police will need to be satisfied about the fitness of applicants before granting or renewing firearm certificates. The chief officer will be able to revoke certificates, or partially to revoke them, if the holder no longer has a good reason for possessing the firearm. In line with Lord Cullen's recommendations the Bill seeks to amend the current legislation to make that clearer.

Police constables' powers of entry, search and inspection, with warrants, will be extended to police civilian officers. That will apply to the premises of registered dealers and licensed clubs, and will cover firearms, ammunition and certificates.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the granting and revocation of firearm and shotgun certificates is arbitrary at the moment, and depends on the views of the chief of police in the area in which one is applying for a certificate? That is unfair to the average citizen, because in some areas it is almost impossible to get a firearm certificate. Will my right hon. and learned Friend consider national guidelines, so that a national standard will apply to such matters?

Mr. Howard: I shall consider my hon. Friend's request, although I am not sure that I share the premise on which his question was based. He has asked whether we would consider national guidelines on such matters, and although I cannot give him any kind of assurance, I shall certainly consider his point.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I shall give way to my hon. Friend, and then I must get on.

Mr. Gallie: May I take my right hon. and learned Friend back to clause 8? Ammunition is not mentioned in connection with the transfer of pistols between one location and another. Is there a case for building in a separation factor, so that ammunition and pistols are never on the streets together?

Mr. Howard: I take my hon. Friend's point—an important one, which we shall consider. I am not entirely certain that what he suggests is necessary, but we shall certainly consider the idea.

There will be some changes to the present way in which target rifle shooting clubs are run. The approval criteria will be given a statutory basis and will be revised to include other recommendations made by Lord Cullen, including keeping a register of members' attendance, appointing a club officer to liaise with the police, and requiring clubs to notify the police when someone leaves the club.

Those are the main provisions of the Bill that I published two weeks ago. The Government recognise that there are real concerns about the historical tradition of firearms in this country. I can give a categorical assurance that the proposals in the Bill will not change the present arrangements exempting antique pistols from firearms legislation.

In addition, I intend to exempt certain other narrowly defined categories of historic weapons. I intend to exempt from the controls in the Bill muzzle-loading firearms that are fired. Such firearms—both historic weapons and modern replicas—are used by historic enactment societies. The Government believe that they can safely be kept at home so long as their owners obtain certificates for them.

Secondly, there is a category of handguns that I shall describe as historic handguns, but not antiques. The Government have received proposals from owners of such weapons for a scheme that would apply to any pistol manufactured before 1919, except for those of 9 mm calibre, for which ammunition is commonly available. In addition, rare handguns, and those with strong historic associations manufactured before 1939, could be brought within the scheme provided that they were authorised by the relevant chief constable.

Under those proposals, pistols in the relevant categories would be subject to stringent restrictions. Their owners would have a choice. They could keep their guns securely at home on the condition that they were never fired, or they could keep and fire them at the national shooting centre at Bisley. The Government see merit in that approach, and will give it careful consideration in discussion with the authorities at Bisley.

Thirdly, we will table an amendment to the existing legislation to allow museums registered with the Museums and Galleries Commission to apply for a museum firearms license. That will exempt from the general ban regimental museums and other similar institutions that are not publicly funded.

The dreadful tragedy of Dunblane placed on the Government an inescapable duty to consider what controls there should be on the ownership and possession of guns. We have not shirked that duty. We have derived great assistance from Lord Cullen's report. We shall implement all 23 of his recommendations. The Bill sets out the way in which the Government believe that his objective of strict control on access to handguns can mostly effectively be achieved.

The Bill will provide the public with the protection that they need and deserve, while allowing a limited amount of pistol shooting to continue in secure conditions. It puts the safety of the public first. I commend it to the House.

5.17 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): As the House knows, the Labour party believes that there should be a complete ban on the general civilian ownership and possession of all handguns of any calibre. We also want other parts of the Bill to be strengthened. None the less, the Bill as it comes before the House represents a considerable advance on the current arrangements for gun control. We therefore support it.

Members of the parliamentary Labour party will have a free vote on the Bill. If there is a Division, my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and I will vote for the Bill, and we invite our right hon. and hon. Friends to join us in the Aye Lobby.

[Mr. Jack Straw]

The Government have done the strength of their case no good by imposing a Whip on all Conservative Members. Such a matter should not be an issue for party politics.

Mr. Howard: Has the hon. Gentleman entirely forgotten his party conference?

Mr. Straw: Mrs. Ann Pearston is a Conservative, and if the Conservative party had any sense it would have invited her to speak to its conference too.

Mr. Howard: I was referring not to Mrs. Pearston's contribution but to that of the Leader of the Opposition who, having repeatedly said that he would wait for Lord Cullen's report before coming to a conclusion on the issue, declared at his party conference that he favoured a total ban on handguns. Moreover, that declaration was made after the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), had specifically asked the Government to postpone publication of the report so that the matter would not be dragged through the party conferences.

Mr. Straw: If the Secretary of State has any complaints about Members of Parliament who sought to make party political capital out of the tragedy, he should look behind him and admonish the six members of the Home Affairs Committee—Conservative Members—who refused to accept motions from my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) and other Labour Members stating that the issue should not be one of partisan concern until Lord Cullen had produced his report. Nothing that my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) said differed from the evidence that my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton and I gave to Lord Cullen in May.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that this sort of argument will be received with some dismay outside the House? The crucial question is how is it that a debate and decision on the administration of a smack on the hand or another part of the body can be a matter of individual conscience for Members of Parliament, but the possibility of the shooting of a gun taking a young life is not? That is what the people of this country will not and cannot understand.

Mr. Straw: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. When trying to distinguish between the Government's positions on firearms and on caning, the Secretary of State said that the former was the Government's considered position. I can only assume that that confirms that their position on caning is their unconsidered position—in fact, they appear to have no position at all on that matter. As my hon. Friend said, if caning is to be the subject of a free vote, I fail to understand why the same logic does not apply to gun control—a matter of far greater importance and one that touches the conscience of hon. Members far more. The Secretary of State must recognise that he will have resolved very little if he wins next week's vote as the result of having dragooned his colleagues into the Lobbies against their better judgment and their consciences.

It is the essence of a democratic society that people should have the right to undertake activities of which a majority might disapprove. Indeed, the test of a democracy is not the freedom that we allow those with whom we agree, but the freedom that we allow those with whom we profoundly disagree. As the trustees of people's democratic rights, Members of Parliament must always be careful about removing or restricting the freedoms of others.

I have never used a firearm in my life, but many decent, responsible citizens do. Some people, such as veterinary surgeons, casualty slaughterers and farmers who have to keep down vermin, need guns for their jobs. Hundreds of thousands of people take part in field and country sports and certain individuals, who between them hold around 200,000 handguns, are involved in various target sports. Although I do not share his conclusions, the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South–West (Mr. Budgen) was right to say, in the debate on the Loyal Address on 28 October:

> "We are assembled here to weigh carefully the rights and liberties of every section of the community, and gun club members have as much right as anybody else to have their views carefully considered when they are unpopular."—[*Official Report*, 28 October 1996; Vol. 284, c. 385.]

Everyone's freedom to do anything must, however, be balanced against the consequences that exercising that freedom poses to others. On any scale, the right to life—especially the right of a child to life—must come higher than the right to practise a sport. Where two sets of rights appear to collide, it is for Parliament to establish a new balance; that is what the Bill and this debate are about.

Following the establishment of the inquiry chaired by Lord Cullen, my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton and I drafted evidence on behalf of the Labour party, which was submitted after considerable discussion in both the home affairs and the Scottish groups of the parliamentary Labour party. In that evidence, we sought to distinguish—as the law presently does—between shotguns and other firearms. We recognise that shotguns can kill human beings, but they are not designed for that purpose. Their size and the time it takes to reload them mean that they are far less likely to be used to effect a massacre than a pistol or other handgun. However, we said that there should a tightening of the licensing procedures, to which point I shall return later in my speech.

Handguns are different from, and inherently more dangerous than, shotguns. I know that that view is not recognised by the British Shooting Sports Council. In its "Public Relations Guide for Shooters", it made the astonishing statement that "guns are not dangerous". That assertion received short shrift from Lord Cullen, who said:

> "No doubt a gun cannot kill if someone does not pull the trigger, but it is right to regard a gun as dangerous and to treat some guns as more dangerous than others."

Handguns can be fired with greater speed and accuracy than shotguns, and can be far more easily concealed. Unlike shotguns, handguns have been developed for the purpose of killing other human beings. That puts them in a category by themselves.

Much of the sport of handgun shooting developed from that principal purpose.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: In a moment.

In many gun clubs, there is a constant reminder of the main killing purpose of handguns. The target shot at is not some abstract design of concentric coloured circles, but the representation of a human being—the so-called humanoid target.

Mr. Devlin: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the weapon most often used in armed crime is the sawn-off shotgun, yet he proposes to ban other weapons such as matchlock and flintlock pistols, which were last used in armed crime during the time of Dick Turpin?

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State gave a powerful answer to that sort of intervention when he pointed out that the reason why Lord Cullen's inquiry was established and the reason for this debate is that 17 people were murdered by the use of a lawfully held handgun. That is the issue before the House.

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): If a person were to lose control of the coach he was driving and 17 passengers were killed, would the hon. Gentleman advocate a limit on the size of coach engines to two litres or a complete ban on coaches?

Mr. Straw: That almost comes into the same category as the views that the hon. Gentleman expressed in the *South Wales Echo* on 30 October—I doubt they will be echoed in the House. The article stated:

"Now he wants people to be allowed to use guns to defend themselves and their property against intruders."

Far from wanting restrictions on guns—a feeling that is widely shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House—the hon. Member wants there to be a vast extension of the use of guns.

To answer the hon. Gentleman's point about coaches, when crashes have occurred and people have been killed, the House has been greatly concerned to ensure that effective safety measures are introduced with the aim of preventing such accidents from happening again.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): When referring to the weapons used by Thomas Hamilton as being legally held, my hon. Friend has repeated on at least three occasions this afternoon the form of words used by the Home Secretary. Indeed, the same was said in respect of Michael Ryan at Hungerford. Will my hon. Friend explain how, when the applications for certificates for the weapons were falsified, and when the police failed to exercise due diligence in checking the details on those applications, those weapons can be classified as legally held or lawful? How can that be?

Mr. Straw: I understand that my hon. Friend's views on the need for gun control differ from mine, but he must accept that there was no evidence in the Cullen report that due diligence was not exercised in respect of the granting of that licence. There was an argument about the judgment of individual police officers, but the issue most forcefully raised by the granting of the certificate to Thomas Hamilton is the defect in current procedures—in particular, the appeal mechanism that places the onus on the police to show why an applicant should not have a certificate, instead of the onus being on the applicant to show why he should have one. I am sorry to have to tell my hon. Friend that we cannot avoid the fact that Thomas Hamilton and Michael Ryan were lawfully licensed holders of the weapons they used to effect a massacre.

Taking all those considerations into account, my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton and I said in our evidence to Cullen:

"in general, given the lethal nature of handguns, we see a strong case for banning them altogether".

We held out the possibility that an exception could be made for .22 single-shot weapons. We went on to say:

"the shooting fraternity must make a case for possession and if they can, they must suggest and accept restrictions and costs necessary to prevent such guns from being used for anything other than target practice".

At the conclusion of our evidence, we said that we should await the recommendations of Lord Cullen

"before coming to final conclusions".

Lord Cullen rightly recognised the inevitable limitations on his inquiry. He confined himself, he said, to

"what I recommend should be considered".

The question of banning certain types of firearms was, he said,

"peculiarly within the province of the Government and Parliament to decide."

So, we have come to our own conclusions. Yes, they are based on Lord Cullen's expert considerations, but we do not substitute his judgment for our own.

First, we considered proportionality. Ever since the atrocity in Dunblane, those opposed to any serious extension of gun control have urged that what happened there should be put into perspective and that we should not get the matter out of proportion. I agree. In Scotland, in the whole of 1993, eight people were killed by the use of a firearm; in 1994, the figure was nine—17 people in Scotland were killed with a firearm in a two-year period. On 13 March this year, 17 people were murdered in just three minutes. In the whole of Scotland in the same two-year period, 15 children were murdered by any means—one fewer than were murdered in just three minutes at Dunblane. Those figures provide the perspective that the gun lobby seeks.

Then there is the argument that, in seeking much tighter control, we are simply being wise after the event. Indeed, it is a dismal commentary that, too often, it takes a single, terrible event to bring into sharp focus the need for action that, if taken before, might have averted the event or greatly reduced its risk. Much—perhaps most—of our safety legislation has been born of disaster.

The history of railway safety in the last century is essentially a history of fatal railway accidents. In this century, Aberfan, Piper Alpha, Zeebrugge, Hillsborough and many other fatal disasters might have been avoided if improved safety had been put in place in advance. In every case, the problem has been not a lack of proposals for improved safety, but the huge pressure in favour of the status quo unless and until disaster strikes or some terrible atrocity occurs.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I am slightly confused about the development of Labour party

[Mr. Henry Bellingham]

policy. The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) wrote a letter to his constituents in September saying that he had no intention of banning innocent members of the public from owning guns. He went on to say:

"It is Labour party policy that people such as yourself will be able to go on owning handguns, but they must be kept safely under lock and key."

I am well aware that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) says that there will be a free vote on the Opposition side, but at what point in time did Labour party policy change on the matter, given the supreme importance to the hon. Member for Hartlepool of the fact that he is obviously senior to the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman should pay more attention to debates in the House. I answered that question on 28 October.

I claim no special foresight on gun control, but there are hon. Members on both sides of the House who can. In March 1987, four months before Hungerford, my hon. Friends the Members for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) and for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) pressed the case on the then Home Secretary for tighter gun control. My hon. Friend the Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) has consistently campaigned for tighter gun control. In May 1995, 10 months before Dunblane, he said:

"As legally held weapons easily fall into criminal hands, new gun controls are necessary."—[*Official Report*, 3 May 1995; Vol. 259, c. 281.]

The right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) has long believed in tighter control—a lot longer than since the day in March when Dunblane occurred—and so have many people outside the House. The week before Dunblane, the Moss Side, Manchester, community association called for further restrictions on the availability of guns.

Mr. Robert Banks: The hon. Gentleman quoted some statistics about fatalities in Scotland. Can he make it clear whether those fatalities were the result of weapons that were held legally and whether those weapons were handguns, shotguns or a mixture of both? What exactly are the figures related to?

Mr. Straw: I will happily send the hon. Gentleman the full table that I was sent by the Library. Even if they were all held illegally, however, it would not help the hon. Gentleman's case because more people were murdered in three minutes by legally held weapons on 13 March than were murdered with firearms in Scotland throughout 1993 and 1994.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Is my hon. Friend aware that a large number of people have been killed with legally held guns? Mr. Tony Hall, the father of one of the victims at Hungerford, has provided me with a list of 178 cases which he has picked at random from newspapers since the Hungerford tragedy.

Mr. Straw: I am aware of that, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing it to the public's attention. There is no doubt that legally held weapons are used by their licensed owners to commit crimes of murder and violence and that such weapons leap across into the criminal underworld.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Before the hon. Gentleman moves on from the subject of safety legislation having resulted from disaster and of what some of his colleagues suggested would happen if we did not have more controls, will he say whether he sees a distinction between improving the safety of an aircraft, ferry or some other such thing and banning the aircraft or ferry? Can he see the difference between doing more by way of control and banning handguns?

Mr. Straw: That is a pretty far-fetched analogy, but I can certainly see the case for banning a particularly dangerous aircraft. Neither side of the House is proposing to ban all firearms. Shotguns and rifles will still be readily available for licensed use. We are discussing whether we should ban particularly dangerous firearms—handguns.

Mr. Allason: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: Yes, for the last time.

Mr. Allason: To return to the intervention of the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), is it not the case that if the police had been doing their job properly, Hamilton would never have obtained the licence? Does not Lord Cullen's report make it clear that at one point there was a conflict between two police officers, and he had to decide which of the two was lying in their evidence?

Mr. Straw: Of course the hon. Gentleman is right to say that there was conflict between the advice of a junior officer and the judgment made by a senior officer—it is well known. With the benefit of hindsight, we can all see that the advice of the junior officer should have been followed. Before the hon. Gentleman continues his odious attacks on the way in which the police try to operate a difficult procedure, he should bear in mind the wholly unsatisfactory state of the law. Hamilton had no convictions and had not been to see a general practitioner for 20 years. There was no medical evidence to show that he was in the mental state that he patently was in, so the judgments were difficult. We also ought to recognise that police officers have to make such judgments every day and sometimes to stand by them five, 10 or 20 years later. That is difficult, and there is no suggestion in Cullen that the due process that is required by the unsatisfactory state of the law was not followed.

In 1970, the Home Office established a review of firearms control under the chief inspector of constabulary.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Before my hon. Friend moves on, will he agree that it is pointless to argue about the failure of the police in this case because public safety and the safety of children must not rely on every policeman for ever more always getting it right? That is nonsensical.

Mr. Straw: I entirely agree. That is why we have to change the way in which the system operates.

I was saying that, back in 1970, the Home Office established a review of firearms controls under the chief inspector of constabulary, but the fate of that review starkly illustrates the huge obstacles placed in the way of action to improve public safety where there has been no atrocity to focus public opinion. The findings of that review, contained in a Green Paper on firearms control, were published by the then Government in May 1973. It recommended highly restrictive controls on firearms, a ban on all semi-automatic rifles, a considerable tightening of the licensing procedure, and higher age limits.

Had that Green Paper's recommendations been implemented, Michael Ryan could not have lawfully possessed the AK47 rifle with which he killed eight of his 17 victims in Hungerford; and the police in Scotland would have found it much easier to refuse Thomas Hamilton his licence for the 9 mm Browning with which he killed his 17 victims. But such was the opposition to the Green Paper that the then Government abandoned it, and no proposals for action were forthcoming until after Ryan had committed his murders in 1987, and even then the proposals did not go far enough.

We must recognise that we failed after Hungerford to put in place the controls necessary significantly to reduce the risk of such an event ever happening again. The then Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), said that the arrangements put in place must be robust enough to last, perhaps, another 20 years. Unfortunately, they were not, because they were watered down by pressure from the shooting interests.

We cannot afford to make the same mistake again. The 1973 Green Paper put forward cogent arguments for tighter controls. It made the point—we all acknowledge it—that no system of legal controls, however stringent, is likely to be wholly successful in preventing criminals from obtaining firearms, but it demolished the argument that there is no connection between the extent of lawful controls and the criminal use of firearms:

"If dangerous firearms and their ammunition had been easier to obtain within the law, if the requirements on legal holders to keep their firearms in safe custody had been less strict, is it plausible to suggest that the extent of criminal and irresponsible uses of firearms would have been less? . . . In its present form the law in some circumstances allows unsuitable persons to possess firearms, or persons to possess firearms without having a legitimate use for them, or to possess more firearms than are required for such uses, or to take inadequate precautions against theft or misuse."

Although controls were tightened somewhat in the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988, Lord Cullen reflected that view in his report. He endorsed research showing that there is a relationship between firearm ownership and firearm use. He explicitly rejected

"the contention that legally held firearms are of no significance to the commission of crime".

Lord Cullen also reported that, during the past 20 years, there has been a considerable expansion of the use of larger-calibre and high-calibre handguns. That has led to the growth of combat shooting. It has also led some shooters to don the trappings of combat, such as holsters and camouflage clothing. It has also caused others to feel uneasy about what appears to be the use of guns as symbols of personal power.

I am one of the millions who feel uneasy about that, and who believe that we must now take effective measures to deal with the growth of an unpleasant gun culture. I know that the Bill, as well as the additional measures that we propose, will inconvenience many innocent and responsible people who happen to have gained enjoyment from the pursuit of target shooting sports, but I would address three points to them. First, as between participation in a sport and the preservation of life, the balance must fall firmly in favour of the right to life, not the right to a sport.

Secondly, even under our proposals, there will still be plenty of opportunities for enthusiasts to engage in shooting sports with rifles or shotguns.

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman must excuse me. Many hon. Members want to speak and I have already given way a dozen times.

Thirdly, the quality of representations that we have all received from the shooting lobby shows, I think, that responsible shooters have been ill served by their representatives, whose arguments have often been tendentious and highly personalised. Those arguments reached their nadir when Mr. Marcus Harrison, of the Sportsman's Association, recommended that shooters in pursuit of their case should

"distort information and manipulate facts".

Mr. Harrison went on, disgracefully, to suggest:

"It is important for us to dig up any facts that can be used to question the integrity of those who run, organise, front and contribute"

to the Snowdrop campaign.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North) *rose*—

Mr. Straw: No, I shall not give way.

It is of course the parents of Dunblane who are in the forefront of that campaign—bereaved parents described by Mr. Harrison, astonishingly, as "our enemies" Ever since Dunblane, the lobbyists for shooting organisations have adopted a complacent but in the end wholly self-defeating approach—one which clearly exasperated Lord Cullen, who said:

"Throughout the Inquiry the British Shooting Sports Council . . . were opposed in principle to any restriction on the availability of handguns; and objected not merely to the suggestion of one kind of ban or another but also . . . to various measures which stopped short of a ban. This entrenched attitude meant that as each measure was supposedly discredited what was at stake became the greater."

I said in the House on 16 October that we welcomed almost everything in the Secretary of State's statement and hence, by implication, in this Bill. The Secretary of State has made the case for going further than Lord Cullen recommended, so there is no need for me to detain the House by repeating what he said. The disagreement between us concerns whether there should be a complete ban on handguns in general civilian use. We believe that there should be.

The Secretary of State quoted the Association of Chief Police Officers in his support, but we strongly support the view of the Police Federation, which represents more than 100,000 police officers on the ground who argue for a complete ban on the compelling ground that the

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.22 calibre handgun is just as capable of killing as a larger calibre weapon. Indeed, if anything, the Police Federation understates the case. Some multi-shot .22s are quicker firing than larger calibre weapons, and easier to conceal. The August edition of the magazine *Target Gun* contained an article extolling the virtues of the .22 Black Mamba multi-shot pistol which, the article said, is virtually concealed in the firer's clenched fist.

Of the 40,000 .22 weapons already in circulation, at least 20,000—perhaps more—are of the multi-shot variety. There must be considerable anxiety that this number will grow as those who receive compensation for higher calibre weapons purchase .22 weapons.

The Home Secretary says that weapons will be kept in secure clubs, but the Bill provides for them to be transported under permit to and from competitions, of which many hundreds are held each year. Ironically, it was the British Shooting Sports Council which demolished the argument that such transportation outside clubs would be inherently safe, for it said in evidence to Lord Cullen:

"no matter what system of checks and paperwork is maintained in such circumstances, it would be a simple matter indeed for a shooter intent on recovering his guns to enter a competition, provide evidence to his club secretary that he had done so, recover possession of the complete gun together with the ammunition for it, and perpetrate an outrage."

The BSSC itself thus predicted that, under such arrangements, its members may end up perpetrating an outrage.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman has completely misunderstood our proposal. The Bill will enable third parties, authorised by the police, to transport firearms from one club to another for the purpose of use in a competition—not the owner of the firearm but an authorised third party. The criticism that the hon. Gentleman has just read out is wide of the mark.

Mr. Straw: I do not think I have misunderstood the proposal at all. The Bill's proposals are not as tight as those in the Republic of Ireland, where I am advised there has been a complete ban on handguns since 1972, and the transportation of any such weapon must be undertaken by the Garda. The Bill does not allow for that. We take the evidence given by the shooters' council to Cullen very seriously.

Mr. William Ross: Surely the hon. Gentleman is aware that the Republic of Ireland is, to put it mildly, widely believed to be the repository of the largest collection of illegal weapons in Europe?

Mr. Straw: Of course I am aware of that, but it does not alter the fact that, to try to control the supply of weapons, there is a complete ban on lawfully held weapons in the Republic.

The other argument advanced by the Secretary of State was that a complete ban would

"drive underground an activity that could then be conducted without any safeguards for security."—[*Official Report*, 16 October 1996; Vol. 282, c. 835.]

As I told the Secretary of State, I take that argument seriously, but I do not believe that that would happen. By definition, all the weapons under consideration are clearly identified, with the owner known to the police. Severe penalties would apply for any evasion. In any event, rather than going underground, there would be plenty of lawful opportunities for people to engage in shooting shotguns or rifles.

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: No, I am sorry.

When the issue of compensation first arose—during consideration of the 1988 Firearms (Amendment) Bill—the then Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witney, resisted the idea, saying that there were serious objections to compensation. Indeed, the White Paper published by him stated that the Government had concluded that, as a matter of principle, it was undesirable and unjust to require the taxpayer to pay for the removal from the public domain of weapons that were an acknowledged threat to life.

In the end, compensation was conceded, but the Minister of State at the time, the right hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), went out of his way to say that the compensation scheme agreed

"cannot be regarded as any sort of precedent".—[*Official Report*, 17 May 1988; Vol. 133, c. 376.]

Parliament has long accepted that where a particular private interest is affected by legislation or by Government decision, proper compensation should be paid. The most usual cases are those in which homes or businesses are adversely affected—for example by road schemes. Different considerations surely apply where a general class of people is adversely affected by legislation—for example to improve public safety. The manufacturers of asbestos, flammable furniture foam and certain drugs have all found that their businesses have been undermined by changes in public safety regulations. As far as I am aware, no compensation has ever been paid to them. They have had to accept the risk.

When industries have been directly and seriously damaged by changes in tariffs, no compensation has generally been paid. Even in cases where compensation arises—for example in road schemes—the rules are tight. Many home owners in my constituency are to receive no compensation whatever for the serious loss of value to their homes caused by the construction of a motorway nearby.

In the present case we think it appropriate that compensation should be paid, not least to ease the process of compliance. However, like the right hon. Member for Witney and the right hon. and learned Member for Grantham, I do not believe that that should be seen as a wider precedent.

Mr. Leigh *rose—*

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: Those of us who follow the debate on Europe inside the Tory party have been greatly entertained by the sudden faith in European judicial institutions shown by former sceptics such as the hon. Member for

Wolverhampton, South–West (Mr. Budgen). Last Thursday, he asked the Secretary of State whether there was

"a serious possibility that the judges of the European Court of Human Rights may oblige the British taxpayer to provide compensation on a much wider basis"—[*Official Report*, 7 November 1996; Vol. 284, c. 1350.]

Mr. Gallie *rose—*

Mr. Straw: We welcome with open arms hon. Members who, like the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South–West, have suddenly shown such faith in the European convention on human rights, and we look forward to his support for our plans to incorporate the European convention into British law.

I must tell the hon. Gentleman and others who are tempted down that path that it will take about seven years and tens of thousands of pounds to get a case to judgment, and that our best advice is that such a case has no chance of success. After all, article 1 of the European convention on human rights provides that

"everyone's right to life shall be protected by law".

That seems to argue for total gun control. The convention is silent on compensation for gun owners.

I will take three interventions, then I must make progress.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman has made clear his view, as have the Government, that there is no precedent for compensating businesses. He has also made it clear that he supports compensation for individuals. Will he comment on compensation for groups of individuals who join to form a rifle club or, in this case, a pistol club, which will necessarily be closed by the Bill?

Mr. Straw: These are complicated matters. If the hon. Gentleman has detailed proposals, I should be happy to consider them, as I know the Secretary of State would be.

Mr. Jessel: Does not the hon. Gentleman know that the European Court of Human Rights is an organ of the 27-nation Council of Europe, which is a voluntary body, and has nothing whatever to do with the European Union?

Mr. Straw: I know that. If only other Conservative Members knew it, it would greatly assist the debate.

Mr. Gallie: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. For a while I had the feeling that he had something against Scots. He has repeatedly said that shooters will still be able to use rifles in pursuit of their sport. He is usually a great champion of the disabled. The disabled can use handguns, but cannot use rifles, especially from wheelchairs. Has the hon. Gentleman thought of that?

Mr. Straw: As I said, I accept that many innocent people who are responsible shooters will suffer as a result of the changes. I regret that, but it is a matter of balance between the right of people to participate in a sport and the dreadful atrocities that have occurred and could occur in the future if handguns remain available. The hon. Gentleman and I come to different conclusions.

There are other issues that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I will pursue in more detail in Committee. I shall mention two now. The first is the issue of age limits. Young people may not marry until they are 16; they may not hold a driving licence until they are 17; they may not drink in a public house or watch a violent film until they are 18; but they may possess a firearm, including a handgun or pistol, from the age of 14. I find that extraordinary. The minimum age of 14 is only a matter of police practice. As the Home Office evidence to Lord Cullen put it,

"the law does not set a minimum age for the issue of a firearm certificate".

We believe that the law must be changed. There must be a minimum age of 18 on the civilian possession or ownership of rifles and any remaining licensed handguns, and tighter restrictions on the use of shotguns by minors.

Mr. John Carlisle *rose—*

Mr. Devlin *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I apologise to the hon. Gentlemen. I have given way a great deal and I must conclude my speech.

The second issue concerns airguns, which are not lethal in the way that shotguns or firearms are, but which can cause severe injury. They remain outside any licensing system. Only yesterday, the Press Association reported that someone had been blinded in one eye by an air rifle. I know from my hon. Friends that thousands of our constituents are harassed and intimidated by the use of air rifles. Because they are wholly outside regulations, no one knows how many there are in circulation. Lord Cullen raised concerns about the dangers posed by air weapons and drew them to the attention of the Home Office in his report. We believe that the time has come for a serious review to establish whether more effective regulation of airguns should be introduced.

My final point concerns the licensing system. Neither Ryan nor Hamilton should have received a licence, but both did. So, if newspaper reports are accurate, do many other unsavoury characters. *The Times* reported on 5 October that a

"disturbed gun enthusiast who drew up plans for a Hungerford style massacre. . . [had] succeeded in becoming the armourer at his local gun club".

The *Daily Express* reported on 11 September how a man who shot his wife dead had been licensed to keep 18 weapons

"despite being in the grip of depression for six years".

Some say, as we have heard this afternoon, that that is all the fault of the police—that the regulations are satisfactory, but that the police have failed to do their job. Many of the most odious comments by members of the gun lobby have been their attacks on the police. In one of their published documents, they have accused the police of having an anti-gun agenda. That is bad enough, but I was astonished to learn that the shooting lobby has been encouraged in its attacks on the police by some hon. Members who should know better. The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith) launched an extraordinary attack on the police last week, saying:

"We have got to make absolutely sure that the police get a good kick in the pants for this"—

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their failure to implement proper firearms controls—

"and take their jobs more seriously where weapons are concerned".

I believe that such intemperate assaults on the professionalism of the police are utterly irresponsible.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that I stand by my remarks. He does not have to rely simply on my opinion. A recent edition of *The Scotsman* newspaper contained an exposé of Hamilton and described how he deluded the police time and again. It concluded that the police were lax and negligent in their actions and it drew disturbing parallels with Ryan and Hungerford. It was an in-depth newspaper article that demonstrated great veracity.

Mr. Straw: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman reads the Cullen report rather than *The Scotsman*. The newspaper article was completely wrong and at variance with Lord Cullen's conclusions. I am interested to hear that the hon. Gentleman—I gave him notice of my intention to raise the matter—does not resile from his attack on the police. In time, we shall remind him and some of his colleagues of their irresponsible behaviour in that regard.

Such attacks on the police demonstrate a significant ignorance of how the present controls work. The police do an excellent job controlling firearms, but they are severely hampered by a licensing system that, in practice, is stacked in favour of the applicant. The hon. Gentleman must consider that point. The changes in the Bill are welcome, but they do not go far enough and we shall seek to strengthen them in Committee.

No system of controls, however tough, can guarantee that there will never again be a Dunblane or a Hungerford. However, we know now that more effective controls would almost certainly have saved the lives of 34 innocent children and adults who were massacred in those two peaceful towns—and perhaps the lives of many others also. We owe it to those who were killed at the hands of those lawfully licensed gunmen to put effective controls in place. We must stop the creeping gun culture that is scarring our society.

This Bill is a welcome beginning, but I fervently hope that it will be greatly strengthened before it emerges from Committee and, above all, that the House will decide that handguns for general civilian use have no place in our society.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All Back-Bench speeches are now restricted to 10 minutes, with the exception of the contribution by the Liberal Democrat spokesman.

6.2 pm

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): I beg to move, To leave out from "That" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a Second Reading to a Bill which includes provisions outlawing the possession of handguns which, without evidence, go beyond the recommendations of the public inquiry conducted by Lord Cullen into the shootings at the Dunblane primary school on 13th March 1996."

I am pleased to move the amendment standing in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Biffen). He apologises for his absence this afternoon, which I attribute to the rapid progress of the legislation and an important previous engagement.

I am vice chairman of the British Shooting Sports Council and member of the council of the National Rifle Association—sadly, neither post is paid. I assure the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who quoted the views of the Sportsman's Association, that we dissociate ourselves from that statement and those of other organisations which lie outside our curtilage. We have sought to behave entirely responsibly and have employed professional advisers of the highest standard. I hope that the hon. Gentleman's accusations will not be levelled at the British Shooting Sports Council, which does not relish the description "gun lobby". We represent shooting rights in the same way as other legal and above-board organisations represent their members' rights.

I recognise the difficulties facing my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary in many areas, not least as a result of the difficult events that have transpired since Dunblane. I believe that an acceptable solution would have been to adopt Lord Cullen's recommendations. Therefore, I have no difficulty with the amendment which states that that is how the Government should proceed. The Government appointed Lord Cullen to do more than simply investigate the events at Dunblane school: they spread wide his remit to include advice on firearms and firearms regulation and licensing. Those who are interested in the sport of shooting took a great deal of trouble to place our evidence before Lord Cullen. He was receptive to our views and asked us to return to clarify detailed points. I believe that it is an error not to adopt his recommendations, as he considered the matter so very carefully.

My right hon. and learned Friend referred to the report of the Forensic Science Service. Although I was assured that the report would be put in the Library last Thursday, owing to some confusion within the Department it arrived only this morning. When I have studied it, I may raise further points about that advice.

It is clear that in rejecting Lord Cullen's main recommendations the Government have their own agenda. I share the view that the Bill's objective should be to prevent an incident such as that at Dunblane from occurring again. I am sorry to inform the House, however, that I am far from convinced that the Bill will have that effect. Those of us who witnessed the passage of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 said at the time that it would not prevent another disaster. It is almost impossible to legislate against lunatics. That problem is not confined to this country—someone tried to gas people on the Japanese underground recently and there was a flamethrower attack on a school in Northern Ireland. There are an endless number of maniacs who seek to kill people by one means or another.

In our case, the press—as is their wont—decided that someone or something must be to blame. A concerted campaign was organised in several national newspapers the day after the Dunblane incident. It grew in depth and intensity and stirred up emotions, not just in Scotland but across the length and breadth of the land, in a manner which did not reflect the views in my postbag. I have talked to many colleagues who do not see evidence of the

supposed wave of public opinion: it is a case of the press feeding off the press, and of the media constantly giving interviews to one side of the argument.

It was not long before Labour Members pricked up their ears. It is extraordinary that the hon. Member for Blackburn should urge us not to play party politics with such emotional matters when he produced lengthy evidence for the Cullen inquiry completely out of the blue. How is the Labour party expert on any aspect of the events at Dunblane?

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman may not be aware of it, but the Home Secretary invited me and Labour representatives to submit evidence to the Cullen inquiry.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: That does not make such evidence any more relevant. I do not agree that there was consultation on the issue within the Labour party, as I know that those Labour Members who are sympathetic to shooting interests were not invited to give their views. Events progressed to the point where, as my right hon. and learned Friend pointed out, the Leader of the Opposition announced—long before Lord Cullen reported—that it was Labour policy to ban all handguns.

Unfortunately, the Government followed suit. There was no consultation with the Firearms Consultative Committee, which is now a marginalised organisation. It has been told that other recommendations which might have assisted in improving gun safety will not be included in the Bill.

I had hoped that the Opposition would adopt a sensible view regarding compensation. There is no precedent for legislation of this sort, which wipes out a section of a sporting community, affecting equipment, ranges and manufacturers. It is a new concept, so it is no wonder that there is no precedent for compensation. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will listen with a sympathetic ear. Although the small improvement in compensation that he announced today is very welcome, it does not go far enough in compensating the hundreds of people who will lose their jobs, for the many thousands of pounds in personal investments that will be lost, or for the misery that will be caused to law-abiding, innocent people who today operate a sensible business which will be outlawed tomorrow. I should add that there is no apparent appeals procedure, where the quantum or nature of compensation could be taken to a higher authority. I hope that that, too, will be part of my right hon. and learned Friend's consideration.

I agree with the comments made about the way in which 50-plus police forces all have a different method of administration. Of course they cannot work together, and for that reason, several years ago we suggested that there should be a national firearms administrative board, staffed by firearms experts, on a national basis, which would produce a national standard and a national register. Those were sensible, commonsense suggestions, but they were turned down by the Home Office.

There are many Committee points that I would like to make, but there is little time today. We were very pleased to learn that muzzle-loaders are to be exempt. I cannot understand why it was even considered that they should be included. The concession on heritage firearms is welcome. There are many other matters: for example, how long will it take to alter club security? What standards will be required?

The hon. Member for Blackburn mentioned a gun culture. I do not recall having seen sporting shooting on television, nor have I heard it reported. Only one newspaper even puts the Bisley results in. The gun culture in this country comes from television, video, the media—day after day, night after night. It should come as no surprise then that, if a madman gets loose, he should look to guns as his way of operating.

I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will remember very strongly that, since the 1988 Act, the number of legally held firearms has gone down and the number of illegally held firearms has gone up. It is the role of the House to protect minorities against oppressive legislation. I believe the Bill to be ill thought-out, illogical and unfair. I am happy to move the amendment, and I shall certainly not support the Bill's Second Reading.

6.11 pm

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I have a particular interest in the Bill in that Thomas Hamilton ran a boys club in my constituency, which met on the Monday night before the massacre on the Wednesday. As a result, I was one of only two Members of Parliament who gave evidence to the Cullen inquiry. In addition, I have a professional interest in airguns which, if there is time, I shall mention briefly at the end.

Lord Cullen's inquiry was an analysis of what happened. He teased out events and then accepted various bits of evidence, from which he came to opinions and conclusions. They are just that. They are not absolute truths. There is nothing inherent in the report that the House must accept absolutely. The final judgment on the matter must be made by the House after assessing all the information. We are helped by Lord Cullen's inquiry, but we are not bound by it.

The hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) said that it is impossible to legislate against lunatics. I accept that. We can never absolutely rule out a recurrence of such an event, but we can try to reduce the possibility and potential of such events recurring. That is the basis of the matter.

The hon. Member for Weston–super–Mare also suggested that somehow or other this is all a press campaign. That is not my impression. I come from Scotland and perhaps the mood there is very different, but I do not believe that. The slaughter of innocents is not a matter which stops at national boundaries. There is an aghast perception against it throughout the country. It is certainly my belief that this matter touches all of us throughout the country, no matter where we come from.

When discussing firearms, we have to realise that the evidence one way or another is not absolute. We should be careful how we handle the information. I think that the argument has been made that it is all about legally and illegally held handguns and that most crime is related to illegally held handguns. There are two separate issues here. There is the normal day-to-day crime, which is committed with or without illegally held handguns, but we are concerned with the one-off, occasional massacres, the mass murders, which are a different issue. The relationship of legal handguns to illegal handguns is therefore not necessarily relevant. I should point out, however, that there is no evidence whatever that crime is committed solely, or even in the majority of cases, with illegally held handguns. The Select Committee examined that matter, and the glaring fact is that there is no statistical basis for that.

[Mr. Sam Galbraith]

Another argument is the comparison between various countries and the relationship between guns and crime: more guns in the United States, more crime; fewer guns in this country, less crime. I caution everyone against such comparisons. We all know that various countries do not fit into this picture. The factors involved in different countries can vary in terms of density of population, climate, or whatever, so it is difficult to draw conclusions. We have to conclude that, so far as the evidence and statistical facts are concerned, positive proof one way or another is not within our grasp and never will be. We simply have to make a judgment on what we have before us.

Another point that is regularly made is that if the regulations were tightened and new ones applied we could prevent a recurrence of these events. There is some force and judgment in that. The regulations could be improved. I should like to see the Select Committee's recommendation implemented—that a person applying for a licence for a firearm should have the medical information that he or she supplies verified by his or her general practitioner. That does not mean that the GP should say whether the person is suitable for a firearms certificate, just that the evidence given is correct. That would be a step forward. I also support the proposal that the onus should be on the individual to give good reason why he or she should continue.

Even if all those regulations were in place, at the end of the day we still could not guarantee that it would prevent a recurrence of these events. The regulations are implemented by individuals, who are fallible. No matter how tight we make them, these are individual judgments, and mistakes will always be made. I have therefore reached the conclusion that the only way to deal with the issue is to reduce the number of handguns and weapons in our society.

I think that it was the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) who asked the Home Secretary how many lives would be saved. That information will never be available to us. The numbers are small, but we could never reach a conclusion on that. All that we can say is that, by reducing the number of guns, it is likely that the number of such events in future will be reduced. I accept that going the whole hog and even removing .22 calibre rifles is an infringement of the civil liberties and rights of some individuals. The House should not remove those liberties lightly. It is important to remember that, as was expressed by the Home Secretary and by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), from time to time the House has to make a balanced judgment and decision. That is our job. Finally, we shall have to do it. That is one of the duties of the House. Sometimes, in the national interest and in the interests of the majority of people, we have to remove rights from others. I make the judgment, which I stand by, that in this case it is necessary to do that.

I am disappointed that airguns are not mentioned in the Bill. I hope that we shall be able to discuss airguns in Committee. I have professional experience of looking after patients who have been injured by airguns: two of them died as a result of their injuries. I have seen the devastation that an airgun pellet causes when fired through the eye socket into the brain. We have no information about the number of airguns held, and the police take the view that airguns would be difficult to regulate, but they must be regulated. We should use this opportunity to consider that problem and bring airguns within the Firearms Act 1968.

Events in Dunblane are seared on the memories of all hon. Members on both sides of the House, without exception. We owe it to those who died at Dunblane and to their parents to ensure that the legislation is right. I and others have been accused of being too emotional. I do not know how a person can be too emotional on this matter. Emotions play a part in our relationships with others. The well accepted philosophical view is that moral relationships are, in part, bound by emotions, and our emotions decide what is right and what is wrong. My view is that it is right for us to ban all handguns and I ask the House to accept that view.

Mr. Jopling *rose—*

Mr. Robert Banks: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will be aware that the crucial argument in the debate is whether handguns should be banned or whether, as an alternative, they should be dismantled. The Cullen report came down heavily in favour of their being dismantled: one part going to the owner, the other part to a gun club. The Forensic Science Service, to which the Home Secretary referred—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Member is going to ask me to rule on this matter in my role as Deputy Speaker and not from my knowledge of firearms.

Mr. Banks: When the Home Secretary gave his reasons for making his decision, he undertook to ensure that the evidence was available in the Library. I have just been to the Library and the evidence is not there. We are therefore undertaking a debate without the evidence relating to the core of the Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is a matter for debate. I imagine that the Government Front Bench heard the hon. Member.

Mr. Howard: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I agreed to a suggestion made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Sir C. Onslow) that the document should be placed in the Library. I was given to understand that it was now in the Library. If that is not an accurate understanding, I shall ensure that it is placed there without further delay.

6.22 pm

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I hope that those interventions will not come out of my 10 minutes.

I shall begin by making two points. First, I have been the holder of a firearms certificate for many years. I have two handguns: they are first world war trophies which belonged to my father. They were dismantled at the police's request, and the parts are kept in separate places. I have never fired them: I cannot remember firing a pistol in my life. I am not a member of a gun club, and I cannot remember visiting one. Secondly, I yield to no one in my absolute horror at the tragedy in Dunblane. There will not be anyone in the House who does not share that view.

I am always concerned when a media-led campaign produces yet again an over-hasty, knee-jerk reaction from the Government. We have seen that too often over the years on both sides of the House. I thought that the Government had learnt their lesson. I hope that the Home Secretary has seriously taken on board Conservative Members' less than supportive reaction to the proposals.

It is right to have strict gun controls. The House knows about my interest in the United States. I have publicly criticised its gun laws, which are hopelessly lax. If anyone wants an argument against having a written constitution, that is one of the strong cases to use. I would not argue for a moment that we must not call in many of the handguns in circulation.

I welcome the relaxation proposals for heritage weapons which my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary announced earlier. We shall hear more details later. I hope that the Minister will be kind enough to explain the position of museums of historic weaponry. I spent Saturday afternoon in the Royal Armouries museum in Leeds, which is one of the world's great exhibitions of armoury. I hope that there is nothing in the Bill that will reduce that wonderful museum.

My main concern is about the effect of the Bill on gun clubs. I have great sympathy with early-day motion 136 in the name of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), which is very much on the lines that I want to pursue. I am especially concerned about the effect of the Bill on the perfectly legitimate sport of pistol shooting.

The Government have resisted pressure to ban all gun club sports—I commend them for that. I could not disagree more with the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who spoke in favour of a total ban. No adequate reasons have been given for an upper .22 limit on handguns that are properly controlled, and that are used by responsible people in shooting clubs.

The message that comes from the Conservative Benches is that shooting sport is not disreputable. It is pursued almost entirely by thoroughly admirable people. Many people learn to use pistols during their professional lives in the armed services or in the police. When people retire from those services, there is no good reason why they should not be allowed to continue to improve their skills and to pursue a sport that, after all, as many hon. Members have said, is an Olympic sport. I cannot understand why those people should be treated as pariahs under this legislation.

It is hard to imagine a more sensible and responsible group of people than those of my constituents who approached me on this matter. They are thoroughly decent people. I guess that all hon. Members would find it difficult to argue with that view, because almost everyone in the House has been approached by members of gun clubs. I do not believe that they should be deprived of their sport of firing higher-calibre handguns just because of an isolated, appalling incident.

The police force was grossly negligent. I heard what the hon. Member for Blackburn said, but he cannot let the police off the hook. A senior police officer had to resign as a consequence of their failure to prevent the dreadful man Hamilton from obtaining a licence. I should have thought that that resignation was sufficient condemnation of the police in Scotland who were involved in this case.

I am especially concerned about people who run gun clubs. I want to read a letter that I did not expect to receive from people whom I cannot remember meeting—I shall not give their names. They live in Sedbergh in my constituency, and their case is probably typical of others up and down the country.

"My husband and myself are hard working, law abiding citizens who have never been a drain on the NHS or DSS or out of work. Although not well paid we are self sufficient—do not cause a nuisance to anyone and respect other people's rights.

Several years ago the opportunity arose to convert a remote quarry to a shooting range for full bore pistol. After several years of physical and financial labour the range met all required specifications laid down and a club was formed and since that date the membership has grown steadily with a wide range of people harmlessly enjoying their sport. Members include police, professional, business, working class—with a fair proportion of family memberships—parents and juniors who have learned to respect the gun and use it safely.

Now all our hard work and years of pleasure are to cease. Tens of thousands of innocent, law abiding citizens are being persecuted although they have committed no crime."

I believe that that sums up what is in the minds of many hon. Members. I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary's announcement of an extension to cover equipment in the money motion, but it does not go far enough. If we are determined to clobber the shooting fraternity—I hope that we are not—we really must compensate them properly.

I strongly support what was said by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), who is now here with us. I do not care about the precedents, of which there are a good many. I am thinking particularly of compensation for those involved in the fishing industry: for many years, decommissioning grants have been awarded to people whose businesses have been clobbered by other policies. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will think again, and compensate people who, through no fault of their own, are being deprived of their livelihood and a large part of their assets.

6.31 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) has expressed a view that is echoed by many Conservative Back Benchers. It is important for many views to be expressed in a debate such as this, but I think that we shall remember that, referring to the banning of guns, Lord Cullen said in paragraph 9.111 of his report:

"proposals such as a ban on the possession of a certain type of firearm raise questions which are peculiarly within the province of the Government and Parliament to decide."

Ultimately, the buck stops with us: it is for us to make that decision—a decision that I think Parliament will want to address very seriously.

As we are too painfully aware, the origins of the Bill lie in the tragic events that took place at Dunblane primary school on 13 March this year, when Thomas Hamilton—with what can only be described as evil intent—opened fire on a class of innocent children. We should not pretend that passing the Bill will somehow draw a line under the tragedy of Dunblane, but I hope that, by producing legislation, the Government have acknowledged what the vast majority of our fellow citizens believe to be true:

[Mr. James Wallace]

that, despite the reforms prompted by the Hungerford killings, our firearms legislation requires further strengthening. We hope that, at the very least, Parliament will try to make our country a safer place for our citizens.

My right hon. and hon. Friends start from the position that the protection of the public is a paramount duty of Parliament. It must be admitted that, in an imperfect world, we do not always get it right; but, after the tragedy of Dunblane, we recognise the need to address the issue again. In this context, we do not believe that the ownership or use of a gun can be considered a right. It is a privilege, and a privilege that can be granted only within a framework of regulation that provides the highest degree of public safety. An important part of that regulatory framework must be control over who is issued with a firearms certificate. I doubt that we shall ever be able to construct a foolproof system, but any system that licenses people like Michael Ryan or Thomas Hamilton requires significant review and amendment.

My colleagues and I feel that perhaps too often the existing regime has been tilted towards the applicant. In today's debate, Central Scotland police have already been the object of some criticism, but, having talked to senior police officers in Scotland—not members of Central Scotland police—I have been left with the clear impression that they have been dealing with firearms certificate applications in a climate in which refusal has been regularly and readily appealed against, often with financial backing from the shooting lobby. Unless the case for refusal was watertight, the police hesitated before refusing. Whereas the law does not stipulate or express presumption in favour of a certificate being granted, it appears that practice was very much to that effect.

We welcome the provisions in part III of the Bill which tighten up on the granting of firearms certificates. The provision to extend the powers for revocation of firearms and shotgun certificates is particularly welcome. In their submission to Lord Cullen's inquiry, the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland noted:

"Unless a certificate holder sustains a criminal conviction during the currency of his certificate, the conditions for revocation may not apply in practice."

Indeed, in his report, Lord Cullen draws attention to the fact that section 30 of the current Act makes no provision for the revocation of a firearms certificate owing to the loss of a good reason. It is right that the Bill rectifies that anomaly.

Another clause in part III relates to ammunition. I note the prohibition on expanding ammunition, and the appropriate exemptions for the lawful shooting of deer or control of vermin. Let me draw to the Minister's attention a letter passed on to me by my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster). It is from a constituent who is a firearms expert, and raises doubts about what is intended—or not intended—by the clauses on ammunition. I do not wish to make what would essentially be a Committee point; I shall pass the closely argued text of the letter to the Minister. It makes the following point, however:

"Sporting bullets are designed to expand and if possible dissipate energy within the body of the animal. Is the Home Secretary suggesting that sportsmen use solid, full patch bullets? These are specifically designed not to expand and intended for human targets . . . they would pass through the body of an animal with little loss of velocity, hit the ground and ricochet in all directions, not good for public safety one might think."

I simply ask for such arguments to be considered in detail, so that we can ensure that we pass sensible legislation. [HON. MEMBERS: "Read the Bill."] I think that the Minister takes my point. I said that the vermin exemption was in the Bill.

As a general rule, we should be particularly careful in passing any legislation when there is a degree of bipartisanship in the approach. We must make sure that we get it right. As is obvious, however, this Bill does not command support across the Floor of the House in every respect. That is particularly the case in regard to how far the ban on handguns should go. I agree with hon. Members who have said today that the House should think hard and deeply before banning an activity that has hitherto been legitimate. As Lord Cullen rightly pointed out, this is ultimately a matter for Parliament.

The Bill proposes some exemptions. I imagine that those who are drafting amendments in favour of a complete ban would allow exemptions for veterinary surgeons, for instance. I welcome the Home Secretary's announcement today that some heritage and antique weapons are also to be included. We look forward to seeing the detail of those proposals. As far as I am aware, there is no history of misuse of such weapons.

Clearly, the key issue is whether we should go beyond what the Government propose, limiting legally held handguns to those of .22 calibre. By banning some handguns—by going further down the road than Lord Cullen recommended—the Home Secretary has made clear his belief that fewer handguns will lead to safer communities and a reduced chance of another Hungerford or Dunblane. I believe that the majority of Members of Parliament, the public and the police would support that. Why, then, should smaller guns be exempt from that logical conclusion? As the Police Federation of England and Wales has concluded,

"handguns are particularly lethal. A person skilled in their use can murder a large number of victims in an incredibly short time."

If we fail to extend the ban to all handguns, we leave open the possibility of development of smaller handguns. By the very nature of the market, if a commodity is limited the natural consequence will be greater investment in similar goods that are left. That is why it is perhaps misleading, although not deliberately so, to assume that, if what is currently proposed would affect 80 per cent. of handguns, that 80 per cent. will always be the figure. Many of those who give up what will become illegal handguns could well then buy what will subsequently be legal.

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) mentioned the number of homicides involving handguns. In paragraph 9.11 of his report, Lord Cullen points out:

"in 12.5 per cent. of the firearms-homicides in Scotland in the years 1990-94 . . . the firearm was lawfully held by the perpetrator."

He goes on to say that the use of legally held firearms in crime was "significant", although small. That evidence cannot be lightly ignored.

Another consequence of the partial ban under the Bill is the obligation of smaller handgun owners to keep their weapons in a licensed club, a measure that could lead to the creation of larger arsenals. Initially, my colleagues and I were willing to consider support for a partial ban,

coupled with an assessment of the feasibility of ensuring that firearms for sporting purposes are kept inside a suitable armoury, subject to nationally agreed standards. Ironically, the Government's response on that aspect of secure storage and the scepticism with which it was met by police persuaded many of my colleagues that that was not a viable option.

The Government's White Paper in response to Lord Cullen's report states that few, if any, existing clubs will meet the criteria. Enforcement of such a partial ban, with such strict club security arrangements, will be complex and costly, certainly compared with, as it were, the clean way of approaching the matter—an outright ban. The hon. Member for Blackburn read out the comments of the British Shooting Sports Council on transport. In clause 8(8), the Secretary of State is given power to designate, by order, the competitions to which people are allowed to take weapons. I am not sure whether he would intend to exercise that power, whether all competitions would be allowed or whether he has in mind some competitions, but that underlines the considerable bureaucracy and cost that will be associated with trying to police and enforce the partial ban.

Moreover, it has been claimed that the security requirements will further reduce the number of legally held handguns in circulation to well below the 20 per cent. shown in the Government's response. If the intended effect is to achieve a near complete ban by the back door, it would be far better for Parliament's credibility if we were to do it by the front door. I hope that, even at this late stage, this will be an opportunity for right hon. and hon. Members to exercise their individual conscience and judgment.

On compensation, it is the duty of the House not to punish the innocent. Clearly, a vast majority of firearms enthusiasts are not criminals. I agree with the comments of the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling). Those of us who have met firearms enthusiasts at our surgeries will recognise the integrity of many of those people, who are going to lose out not only by an outright ban, but even by a partial ban. When it deprives many people of their hitherto legal sport, the House must face up to the consequences with regard to compensation.

As it stands, what the Bill proposes is inadequate. It was therefore welcome news to hear the Home Secretary announce that he is willing to hear further debate before closing the door on compensation, which would have been the effect if the money resolution were passed this evening. He accepts that, as well as the weapons, there are the accompanying accessories, ammunition and specialist equipment. We said that there was no precedent for small businesses being covered, but perhaps it would be interesting to know whether there is any precedent in such circumstances for small businesses not to be covered.

I ask the Minister to deal with the fact that many people will have what will be, technically, legal handguns—if the Bill is passed as it stands—but will not find an outlet for using them if all clubs in their region cannot meet security requirements. If, in effect, they have to give up their weapons—because they cannot use them anywhere—it would be only fair if they were entitled to compensation.

If gun owners are not adequately compensated, that not only would be unfair but would potentially lead to the Bill not working effectively. If compensation is inadequate, many gun owners may be less likely to part with their weapons. They may find overseas markets with a higher price and thereafter those guns may find their way back illegally into Britain. That could lead to the legislation's aims being defeated. I hope that there will be a proper opportunity for the Government to listen to the legitimate demands for much wider compensation.

Let us not pretend that, by passing the legislation, even amended to extend to a full handgun ban, we can guarantee that somewhere, sometime, some wicked or deranged person will not cause a further outrage. Constant effort, for example, will be needed to combat the illegal use of guns. We can legislate to make such outrages less likely by restricting the guns legally available and by restricting those to whom certificates may be granted.

The Bill goes some significant way towards achieving that. It should be supported, but it can be made better still by the amendments that we will debate next week.

6.44 pm

Sir Cranley Onslow (Woking): The headquarters of target shooting in Britain are at Bisley in my constituency. I have been involved with shooting ever since I was elected to the House. I have been a co-opted member of the National Rifle Association council for 30 years. I do not own—and it is a long time since I have shot with—either a revolver or a pistol, but I have many friends and constituents who do. Many of them will be adversely affected by the Bill.

Having said that, I still assert that every member of the shooting community in Britain was just as appalled and shocked by the Dunblane tragedy as the rest of nation. I resent the implication that sometimes arises in discussion that that is not so.

What happened at Dunblane exposed serious deficiencies in the present law and in its enforcement, and the need for fresh legislation, but we all need to recognise that, if we are to legislate, we should not do so under any illusions. No Bill can undo what happened at Dunblane, wreak revenge on the man Hamilton or guarantee that mass murder will not occur again by some other means. One has to consider only the Oklahoma tragedy to recognise what can be done with materials that are easily available for public purchase.

Any Bill that we consider must be thought through properly and framed carefully. I am sorry to have to say to my hon. Friend the Minister of State that the Home Office does not seem to have persuaded Britain as a whole that the legislation is as carefully framed as it should be. Certainly, it has not persuaded the shooting community, which generally supports the recommendations of Lord Cullen's excellent report, but which in many cases is not persuaded that the Government's solution of going beyond Cullen is justified.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) has just handed me the letter from the Forensic Science Service, on which the Government appear to rely in going beyond Cullen. Although the limitations of time do not make it possible for me to read it out, I hope that hon. Members will read it. I should be surprised if they thought that it is very adequate in what it says.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary upset people in the way that he handled the matter. I do not understand why he did not keep his undertaking to

[Sir Cranley Onslow]

consult the Firearms Consultative Committee before coming to the House with legislation, particularly in relation to Lord Cullen's preferred option not to ban larger-calibre pistols and revolvers, but to require them to be dismantled when stored. That refusal has led to much suspicion, which was not necessary and which needs to be ironed out in full debate. There has been no proper test of the practicality of Lord Cullen's option and many people remain convinced that it is a workable solution that would save bureaucracy and public expense.

I hope that the Home Secretary will understand that he does not carry full conviction on his decision and that the owners of guns that are to be banned have some justification in thinking that they are being used as scapegoats, which is unfortunate. They are overwhelmingly decent, law-abiding citizens, as many hon. Members have said. Their sport has been legitimate and is internationally recognised as such. If they are to be deprived of it, after the Bill has had full consideration in the House, it is obviously equitable that they should have full and proper compensation.

I welcome the Government's decision to withdraw the money resolution that they originally tabled. I shall reserve judgment on compensation until I see what form the fresh money resolution takes. Although we have been encouraged to believe that it might deal with the vexed questions of historic guns and antique guns and weapons, what is to be the position with regard to collections of guns? How are they to be valued? How, in particular, is the very important matter of loss of livelihood to be treated under the new money resolution?

I received a letter today from a constituent who works as a gunsmith. He started 20 years ago as an apprentice and is now a partner in the business, which stands to be ruined by the Bill. Surely he must be entitled to proper compensation, as must all others in the same position. It is monstrous that, simply because there are restrictions on public expenditure, the House should consider allowing such people to be victimised and penalised in the way that is likely to happen under the Bill. After all, it was not the owners of pistols and revolvers who allowed Hamilton to hold and use his guns, so they should not bear the brunt of the penalty.

I am satisfied to some extent by what my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said. He has undertaken to produce amendments and his concession on compensation is something that the House should welcome. However, matters have not yet reached the position where I would feel disposed to support the Bill. Indeed, if the money resolution had not been withdrawn for amendment, I should most certainly have voted against it.

6.50 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I welcome the Bill as a further strengthening of the firearms legislation. However, we could achieve the objective that we all have in common—to control access to handguns, to ensure that a repetition of Dunblane is not possible and to make it impossible for people to have complete handguns outside licensed and controlled premises—by the much simpler proposal of requiring dismantling of guns.

I tabled an amendment that was not selected. My early-day motion 136 fits in with the reasoned amendment moved by the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin), which is a more bland and statesmanlike version of my proposal. Everybody has in common the aim of taking guns off the streets, preventing them from being available outside licensed premises and making another Dunblane impossible. We can make it impossible to have complete guns outside licensed premises by requiring guns to be dismantled. In other words, part of the gun—presumably the heavier part—would be kept at the gun club under security, while the other, lighter and more portable part could be taken home by the gun owner. If that were to be the basic approach in our legislation, it would be cheaper, safer and less draconian than a ban, whether complete or partial, such as the Government are proposing.

I am making my suggestion out of rational motives. I am not a gun enthusiast; indeed, I do not like guns. I am not persuaded by the arguments that the gun lobby has put before us. I am not part of the gun lobby. I do not like speaking for anyone else. That is a problem I often have in politics because I rather like to put my own point of view. I have reached my point of view by reading the evidence, reading the Cullen report and reading the Government's reply. I hope that I am suggesting a rational approach. I believe that it is the most direct and effective route to securing what we all want.

This is an emotive issue. We pass the worst legislation when we rush into it under the influence of strong emotion. We must stop and think. So far, the Government have taken a rational approach by appointing Lord Cullen to carry out a full inquiry. That was very sensible. Indeed, if there had been such an approach after Hungerford, Dunblane might never have happened. There are the beginnings of a rational approach and we must see where that takes us.

In paragraph 9.106 of his report, Lord Cullen said:

"I am satisfied that of all the measures which stop short of a ban the one that is open to the least objection on the ground of practicability is the temporary dismantling of the self-loading pistols and revolvers by the removal of major components . . . It has the merit that it does not require clubs to accommodate the handguns, with the various accommodation and security problems which I have already mentioned. In each case the component which is removed could be kept by a club official or on the club premises, where there was adequate space and security for the purpose, while the remainder of the handgun would be kept by the shooter at home."

Lord Cullen repeats that recommendation in paragraph 9.112.

The Government should consider that approach to see whether it would fulfil their objective. However, there is no evidence that the Government have considered that approach with the same open-mindedness shown by Lord Cullen. Instead, they have concentrated on refuting another of Lord Cullen's suggestions—that there should be barrel blocks. They said that that would be impossible and it probably would be. However, they have ignored the most serious and important recommendation of dismantling.

The Government said in their reply that dismantling was not a practical proposition for some types of handgun. I am no expert; I do not know guns. However, people who do know guns tell me that it is possible to dismantle 95 per cent. of handguns. Indeed, handguns must be dismantled for cleaning. The Government could then ban any handguns that could not be dismantled. That would be an easy way round the problem. I do not understand why the Government did not adequately consider that proposal.

The Home Secretary said this afternoon that frequent dismantling could affect weapons through wear and tear, making them less reliable and less accurate. People interested in shooting would not buy guns that became less accurate over a period. The guns must be dismantled for cleaning. It is not a complicated, technical operation requiring the attendance of a specialist.

The advantages of dismantling are enormous. For example, currently the costs of compensation are unknown and unpredictable. We do not know how much it will cost to compensate people fairly and reasonably, as we must do. That problem would not exist under the dismantling proposal. The dangers of theft raids on licensed premises and the massive security required if clubs are to keep .22s would not exist, because any raider would get only incomplete weapons. That is equally true of a raid on the home of a gun owner.

An extremely important point is that the proposal is less draconian than the Government's proposals and would allow the sport to continue. I have had intermittent discussions on the issue with the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor). He appears to be more inclined to talk about it on radio and television than in the Chamber. He is not here at the moment. He evinces—as many do—a great distaste for gun clubs and their members. I do not share that distaste. Some of my constituents are members of gun clubs and they have a right to enjoy their sport. I would not get any pleasure out of it. The only shooting equipment I want to handle is an old camera. Being a Yorkshireman, that is much better, because a gun can cost about £1,000 while a 1938 Retina costs £25 and gives me much greater pleasure than handling guns.

If people can be enabled to carry on their sport in controlled and licensed premises, why not? We must draw a balance between freedom and control, and we can achieve that through the dismantling proposal. I discussed the matter this morning with some of the parents of children killed at Dunblane. I am grateful to them for being prepared to talk to me. I did not convince them in any way. Indeed, they were far more effective in convincing me than I was in convincing them. They raised objections saying, for example, that in 1989 one man killed somebody in a gun club in Stockport. No proposal could stop that happening—certainly not either mine or the Government's.

The parents asked about illegal weapons. The Bill does not increase penalties and sanctions for possession of illegal weapons, as it should. They also asked about the problem of people using spare parts to replace parts left at clubs—a problem that could easily be dealt with through licensing conditions. A police representative at the meeting said that a dismantling requirement would be more difficult to enforce. It probably would, but it would be less expensive than the current proposals. Moreover, we must put effort into enforcement if we are to make control effective.

At the end of my discussions with the people from Dunblane—I am grateful to them for seeing me and discussing the issue with me—I came to the conclusion that they want, first, to end the gun culture. They are right in wanting to reach that goal, but it will achieved through a long-term process of education and controlling violence on television, which we should support.

Secondly, the parents want a complete handgun ban. From their viewpoint, they are right to want that, and in similar circumstances I, too, would want it. But the Bill does not provide a complete ban. My proposal, which echoes the Cullen report, will provide much more effective control.

Ultimately—after the parties have imposed three-line whips or allowed free votes, and hon. Members have expressed their views—there is no guarantee of the type of ban that will emerge. Will the ban be partial or complete? To approach the issue through dismantling would obviate that problem, because it would provide the enormous advantage—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Time is up.

7 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I warmly welcome the Bill and the extent to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has acted on the issue of handgun control. I also pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland for the part that he has played in ensuring that the Government have come as far as they have. We should be quite clear about the fact that the Bill is not a knee-jerk reaction by the Government. The Cullen inquiry was conducted over many months, and now, after considered reflection, the Bill has been introduced and we are debating it, after which hon. Members will have to decide what will happen.

Although I welcome the Bill and the Government's actions, I firmly believe—from some of the noises that have been made on the Conservative Benches, some hon. Members believe differently—that there is no distinction between .22 calibre weapons and other handguns. I plan to table an amendment to the Bill in Committee which, if selected, would propose to ban all handguns.

The question that we must ask is: what will be the effect of legislation on .22 shooting and gun ownership? Is it safe to allow .22s to be kept in the manner proposed in the Bill? I have heard two versions—both from Ministers, so at least one version must be right—of what will happen. The first possibility is that compensation will be used by target shooters to buy a .22, and therefore the number of people with .22s will increase greatly.

The second possibility is that .22 target shooting will not prove popular with target shooters—as my local target shooters have told me—and the restrictions will be so rigorous that the sport will disappear. Both outcomes cannot happen.

It would be unacceptable if the first possibility were to happen, and we ended up with more .22s and a return to the gun culture that many of us would like to be abolished in the United Kingdom. If the second possibility is more likely, perhaps we should—as the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said—be a bit more honest and say at the outset that we will ban .22s.

The issue is not simply a matter of licensing. I have heard Conservative Members in this debate say—from a sedentary position or by intervening—that Dunblane was the fault of Central Scotland police and an example of the licensing system not being operated properly. Of course there were faults in the licensing system, but the Cullen report states, time and again, that no licensing system

[Mr. Robert G. Hughes]

could stop another Thomas Hamilton. Very helpfully, the British Shooting Sports Council made it clear that it agrees with that statement. It said:

"no matter what system of checks and paperwork is maintained in such circumstances, it would be a simple matter indeed for a shooter intent in recovering his guns to enter a competition, provide evidence to his club secretary that he had done so, recover possession of his complete gun together with ammunition for it, and perpetrate an outrage".

So everyone is agreed that it is not merely a matter of licensing, and that we must go further.

If we are to consider allowing .22s to be kept under the conditions set out by the Government, we should, first, consider those weapons. We must be clear that the .22 is the chosen weapon of Mossad, the Special Air Services and, allegedly, of professional assassins. Moreover, the shooters' lobby—to which I am again grateful—praised .22s as being better, easier to use and equally lethal.

Page 117 of the Cullen report states:

"It should not be supposed that .22 rimfire cannot be as lethal as other ammunition. The BSSC pointed out that at point-blank range and aimed at vital parts of the body .22 cartridges would be as lethal as 9 mm."

At the bottom of the page, it states:

"The BSSC pointed out that due to the lower recoil forces involved in .22 rimfire it was possible to fire a greater number of controlled and carefully aimed shoots in a given space of time than was possible with centrefire."

So we cannot rely on the fact that those weapons are safe.

Those weapons were not safe for Mr. Duncan Allman, a father of three who was shot at his gun club, where he was acting as the range officer. Not one proposal in the Bill would have done anything to save him. Perhaps someone should explain to the families of Robert Kennedy, Yitzhak Rabin or Ronald Reagan—who was nearly killed with a .22—that .22s are safe. Perhaps someone should explain it to James Brady, who was disabled and nearly killed by a .22. In my judgment, and in the judgment of the shooting fraternity, .22s are equally lethal, and they should be banned.

I share the view expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House that, in general, target shooters are reasonable people who simply want to go about their law-abiding activity of shooting at targets. I have spoken to many shooters in my constituency and have visited the gun clubs that some of them use. I pay tribute to their reasonable approach in their discussions with me, even after I came to the view that we should ban their sport. I must agree with the hon. Member for Blackburn, however, that the BSSC has done nothing to help the case of shooters; in fact, shooters have been let down very badly by the BSSC. At paragraph 9.110 of his report, Lord Cullen states:

"throughout the Inquiry the BSSC who acted as the umbrella body representing the interests of the shooting community at large were opposed in principle to any restriction on the availability of handguns; and objected not merely to the suggestion of one kind of ban or another but also . . . to various measures which stopped short of a ban."

We have seen that type of belligerence and negative attitude in this debate.

Some aspects of the campaign by shooting organisations should be rejected by the House, and hon. Members who support shooting organisations in this debate should make it clear that they distance themselves from those aspects. The action against Ann Pearston, from the Snowdrop campaign, has been an absolute disgrace. She became involved in that campaign, although she had never been involved in politics before. In a whispering campaign by shooters, she has been accused of being a poll tax evader, of being at Greenham common and of raising money for the IRA. All those allegations are false, but no apology has ever been given or statement withdrawn by the shooters. The Dunblane parents—my God, one would have thought that they had suffered enough losing children who were barely more than babies—have been described by the National Pistol Association as "the enemy". What a disgrace. They have received hate mail from shooters for a long time.

Mr. John Carlisle: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hughes: I shall be happy to take an intervention when I have finished this point.

Is it not a disgrace that the people who lost their children have had to have their mail diverted so that others can sift it before they see it?

Mr. Carlisle: Perhaps my hon. Friend ought to know that after the comments that I made—I hope to catch your eye later and refer to them, Madam Deputy Speaker—I received hate mail and death threats. I have received some extraordinary letters from people threatening my life. The traffic is not all one way. We should not be trading emotions, but my hon. Friend ought to know the facts from the other side.

Mr. Hughes: Naturally, I deplore what has happened to my hon. Friend as well, but Mr. Marcus Harrison, who has already been mentioned in the debate, clearly does not deplore what has happened and regards such behaviour as merely part of the rough and tumble of the campaign.

The Dunblane parents have been accused of coercing children to sign the petition and have been libelled as having misused council facilities. On the day on which they first saw the Cullen report, they received a picture of all of them cut out of a newspaper with the word "Bastard" written across it. What sort of people are we dealing with?

We are dealing with public policy in the proper way. This way of legislating has a longer history than the hon. Member for Blackburn suggested. There are historical precedents after incidents such as the Peterloo riots for the House deciding to change public policy because of what has happened. We have that responsibility and I hope that we shall exercise it by banning all handguns.

7.11 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): It is not hard to understand why there has to be a three-line Whip for Conservatives tonight. With the exceptions of the hon. Members for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) and for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) and one or two others, the Conservatives are clearly opposed to the Bill.

I welcome the Bill as a first step, albeit an inadequate one, towards limiting the enormous growth of weapons in private hands. The ban on handguns, however, does not go far enough—it should be total. I particularly welcome the ban on mail order weapons.

Some have argued that the Bill is a panic response to a single event and is therefore bound to be botched. I agree that it is a panic response to a single event, but the event that caused the panic that gave rise to the Bill was not the tragic massacre at Dunblane; it was the public reaction to the report produced at the beginning of August by the Home Secretary's hon. Friends on the Home Affairs Select Committee. I strongly suspect that, until that time, the Home Secretary had hoped to get away with no more than a little tinkering. He had hoped that his hon. Friends on the Select Committee would provide cover for that minimalist approach. Only when he saw the public reaction to the report did he decide to act. Within a few hours of the publication of the majority report, anonymous Home Office briefers were already trying to draw a little distance between the Government and Conservative members of the Select Committee.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mullin: I shall give way briefly, because I have only a short time.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I hope that he is not suggesting that the Home Secretary had any input into the majority report of the Home Affairs Select Committee. It was completely independent. I should like the hon. Gentleman's confirmation that he accepts that.

Mr. Mullin: The thought never passed through my mind. However, I am afraid that the Home Secretary has not done enough. The distinction that he seeks to make in the Bill between weapons over .22 calibre and those under is, as others have pointed out, hopelessly impractical. As the hon. Member for Harrow, West said a moment ago, it will merely create a surge in demand for lower-calibre weapons. Many shooters will use their compensation to buy other weapons. Indeed, I received a letter this week from someone who promised to spend every last penny of his compensation on new weapons. As others have argued, a .22 weapon in the wrong hands can also inflict considerable damage.

I could have been convinced—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) wants to say that out loud, I shall gladly give way to him.

I could have been convinced that the use of handguns for sporting purposes should continue to be permitted if they could be safely stored at a central location rather than at home. However, the shooting lobby—as others have said, what an inept lot they are—argued forcefully that that was not possible. No doubt they were hoping to convince us that there was no alternative to home storage, but they succeeded in convincing me that a total ban on handguns was the only practical solution.

As I have said, the Bill does not go far enough. A reduction in the total number of guns of all types in circulation is a desirable objective. In its evidence to the Select Committee, the British Shooting Sports Council talked approvingly of the vast explosion in recent years in the number of weapons for sporting purposes. I believe that the time has come to turn the tide and that the Bill ought to be the opportunity to do so.

I want a total ban on handguns. No doubt an amendment will be tabled to that effect and I shall vote for it. I want a large reduction in the number of shotguns in private hands, starting with those in urban areas. Shotguns, licensed and unlicensed, feature all too frequently in crime, in suicides and in accidents. They have featured in several recent incidents in and around my constituency.

A few months ago, a Sunderland councillor had a shotgun placed against his living room window and fired at him. In September, a 14-year-old boy in Houghton-le-Spring, near Sunderland, was accused by two workmen of stealing tools. The boy ran off, returning a few minutes later with a shotgun belonging to his grandfather—another legally held weapon—to threaten the workmen with it.

Most incredible of all was the case in Scotland, not long after the Dunblane tragedy, when a 12-year-old boy prised open his father's gun case, took out the shotgun, sawed off both barrels, took the cartridges, wrote on them the names of the children at school whom he was going to kill and set off to school with the sawn-off shotgun, where, thank goodness, he was overpowered before he could do any damage. That is yet another example of a legally held weapon falling into the wrong hands.

There are said to be some 2 million legally owned shotguns in circulation. Once again, those of us who favour drastic action are indebted to the shooting lobby for making our case for us. Mr. Yardley, one of the gun lobby's most vociferous spokesmen, said the other day that there was no point in doing anything about handguns unless we also did something about shotguns. I agree.

Everyone understands that farmers need shotguns to deal with pests. It is more difficult to understand why someone living on a housing estate in the middle of Sunderland needs a shotgun in his home. I favour a big reduction in the number of shotgun licences, starting with those in urban areas.

Mr. Robert Banks: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mullin: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am limited for time.

The age at which someone may use a shotgun should be raised to 18.

I also want a reduction in the number of air weapons, many of which are in the hands of children. Lord Cullen drew attention to the problem in paragraph 9.119 of his report. I am sorry that the Government are taking no notice of him on that. As most of my hon. Friends can testify, air weapons in urban areas are the source of a great deal of low-level mayhem. As my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) made clear, they can inflict some pretty terrible, and sometimes fatal, injuries.

A little while ago, a neighbour of mine came within a fraction of an inch of being paralysed for life by a pellet from an air rifle that lodged close to his spine. A woman who used to work for me had her windows shot out by youths who were driving down her street shooting out windows at random. A man stopped me in the street the other day and said that his neighbour's son had already slaughtered most of the wildlife in his garden and was now firing randomly across a road used by traffic and pedestrians. I want air weapons to be brought within the licensing system. No one under 18 should be given a licence and there should be a presumption against granting licences to those who live in urban areas.

[Mr. Mullin]

Like many hon. Members, I have received hundreds of letters from irate shooters. Most, but not all of them, are courteously worded and advance a number of reasons—several of which we have heard this evening—for leaving things as they are. They argue that most crime is carried out with illegally held weapons and that the Bill will not stop criminals getting their hands on guns. That is not entirely true. Many weapons that fall into the wrong hands initially have licensed owners and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said, it is an irrefutable fact that no amount of bluster can get around that the massacres in Dunblane, Hungerford and Tasmania were carried out with legally held weapons.

As I mentioned in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn, Tony Hall, the father of one of those killed at Hungerford, has compiled a list of 178 people who have been shot dead with legally held weapons since 1988. In some cases, whole families have been wiped out when one member—not necessarily the one with the gun licence—has gone berserk with a licensed weapon.

Although a ban on handguns will not prevent further tragedies, it will at least reduce the likelihood of them happening. It is argued that the overwhelming majority of shooters pose no threat to society and that an entire sport should not be jeopardised by the actions of one madman. I agree that, thank goodness, there are not many Thomas Hamiltons about and most shooters are upright citizens. However, unstable personalities are attracted to guns. Let me draw the attention of the House to an article—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

7.21 pm

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Let there be no doubt whatsoever of the universal horror and condemnation felt in every part of the House for the depth of wickedness shown by Thomas Hamilton at Dunblane last March. Those of us who oppose the banning of a long-established sport are not blood-thirsty savages: we too have wept for the innocent children and their teacher who died.

I have never owned a pistol, let alone shot one. I am not a member of the so-called gun lobby and I came to the matter with a totally open mind. If anything, I was rather inclined to support the idea of banning guns. However, I am a member of the Select Committee on Home Affairs. After Dunblane, we spent many weeks studying evidence and listening to witnesses, and I became increasingly convinced that the way forward is to impose stringent new licensing procedures and to take a number of other measures to stop guns falling into the wrong hands.

The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) quoted members of the gun lobby saying that the Bill would not stop people killing. Nothing will stop madmen going on the rampage. If they do not have guns, they will use something else, so we cannot pretend that we can magically end danger to all people in the country.

The six Conservative Members on the Select Committee expressed that opinion, and in so doing ran headlong into a campaign of hate and vilification such as I have never seen. *The Sun* newspaper and a rag called *The Daily Record* gave out our addresses and telephone numbers and urged their readers to write or telephone and condemn us.

As a result, I received a number of death threats. I was sent photographs of myself with a bullet hole through the centre of my forehead. I received parcels of excreta and, worst of all, threats that people intended to wait outside the schools that my grandchildren attend and shoot them.

I received about 40 letters of condemnation, only five of which were calm and sensible and inquired why I voted as I did. Since then, I have received nearly 1,000 letters from those who support the sport. Two themes run through them. First, there was a great sadness and sympathy about the horror of Dunblane and, secondly, there was a disbelieving outrage among the writers of those letters that they would have to pay for Hamilton's crime. They are not criminals; they are among the most responsible, disciplined and law-abiding people in the land.

A number of women shoot as a sport, and there are disabled shooters. Women and disabled people can participate in the sport without being disadvantaged by size or disability. I must confess that I never thought that I would see the day when a Conservative Government would rush to deprive such people of the opportunity to pursue their chosen sport—and rushing they are. There has been no chance for a proper debate in the country or for proper consultation. To my mind, there has never been a clearer example of hard cases making bad laws.

Why did the Government set up the Cullen inquiry and then fail to accept its recommendations? Why did they ignore the deliberations of the Home Affairs Committee? However much shock and horror we feel, it is wrong to make judgments on the basis of emotion, even though those emotions are fully justified and understandable.

At first I thought that the Bill would permit the sport to continue, but now I have no doubt that it will bring an end to the legal sport of target shooting. If we are not careful, the Bill will impose great injustice in failing to pay proper compensation, not only for guns, but for property. I do not believe that the Government have counted accurately the cost of compensation, which could well be as much as £1 billion—certainly more than half a billion pounds. I would prefer that money to be spent on hospitals, housing or schools.

The Bill will turn any remaining gun clubs into fortresses. They will certainly be desirable targets for criminals who wish to acquire guns. It would be far more sensible to pursue the idea of dismantling guns, with one part being kept at the home of the shooter and the other at the gun club. I agree with the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), and would add to what he said. It would much safer if one part of the gun were in one place and the rest were in another because any criminal who attacked the gun club would not know where the rest of the gun was kept.

There are many other issues. Members of The Sealed Knot, a well-known and respected historical group, use replica guns that fire blank ammunition. They also use smooth-bore muskets and cannons firing black powder. Will they have to stop? Olympic events use only .22 guns, but other world and regional pistol contests do not. Will there be compensation to firearms dealers and manufacturers?

I am aware that others wish to contribute to the debate and I have no wish to prolong my speech. I believe absolutely fundamentally that we owe our constituents and the country calm judgment on a highly emotional matter. We must carefully consider all points of view, ask ourselves whether the Bill will do what we intend it to do and, above all, make just and fair decisions. Those are the duties that we owe the people of Britain, and I do not believe that we are carrying them out by supporting the Bill.

7.29 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): I hope that no one in the House will accuse me of ignorance about the destruction that firearms can cause. I have seen much of it and attended enough funerals to know exactly what the consequences of illegal firearms are in this country of ours.

As usual, the Bill's purpose is set out in the long title. It is

"A Bill to amend the Firearms Acts 1968 to 1992; to make provision in relation to the licensing and regulation of pistol clubs; to make further provision for regulating the possession of, and transactions relating to, firearms and ammunition; and for connected purposes."

That, in itself, is a considerable exercise in misdirection. We all know perfectly well that the Bill's real purpose is to try to prevent another atrocity like the one that occurred at Dunblane primary school. The question to be asked, therefore, is simply whether it will accomplish that objective. Have the Opposition and the Government reasoned their way through the matter? The Home Secretary's comments today about the money resolution left me yet again with a clear impression that something had been cobbled together hurriedly without the slightest thought about its implications or what it was intended to accomplish.

If the Bill has not been reasoned through, one is forced to conclude that the House, the Government and the Opposition are being driven by the tabloid press and emotion, which is the late 20th century equivalent to the 18th century mob and its agitators. When we are sent here, we are charged to look after the best interests of our constituents. We need, therefore, to think a problem through and apply reason to it. If we do not, we betray those best interests and end up with the poll tax or legislation such as the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. With this Bill, we are going down exactly the same route to exactly the same evil consequences. The Government are yet again thinking through what is to be done about knives, and are—to some extent, I believe—bringing back the old sus law, which is widely welcomed on the Opposition Benches—to the surprise of those who take an interest in such matters.

We had perfectly workable legislation on dangerous dogs in Northern Ireland before the enactment of the Dangerous Dogs Act. We on this Bench advised the Government simply to apply it to the whole of the United Kingdom. They declined, making the excuse that it did not work. Nobody in Northern Ireland thought that. We all thought that it worked quite successfully. We have not managed to improve matters in Great Britain from that day to this.

The law governing firearms in Northern Ireland is perhaps the strictest in Europe. There is, therefore, a ready-made body of legislation that could be lifted in its entirety and applied to the rest of the United Kingdom. The Government have failed to do that, and I think that they will live to regret it. We have a very tight system governing the application and revocation of licences, and an appeals system which is cheap and effective. Of course, since the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has to take the final decision in the appeals system, it is not very welcome to Ministers in this place.

As has already been pointed out, the proposals in the Bill will have widespread effects on persons who make their living from shooting sports and have many ramifications that have not yet surfaced. The letters that we have all received tell part of the story.

Given the impact of the Bill, why has no greater thought—no detailed consideration—been given to who was responsible for what happened? In the final analysis, responsibility lay with Hamilton, but was the granting of his application and the subsequent renewals of firearms certificates done in such a fashion as to inspire confidence in police procedures? Anyone who has read the Cullen report—I hope that all hon. Members have—is forced to conclude that the procedures were plainly not conducted in a way that inspires confidence.

Given police responsibility and the effect on clubs, why did the police take into their possession the records of many shooting clubs in Scotland, and why have they not yet been given back? I do not know how many records they took. I think that we would all like to know. Without such records, clubs are deprived of information that they might need. Why was no receipt given? When will the documents be returned to the clubs? Will the Minister assure the House that copies of standing orders on firearms administration for police forces throughout the United Kingdom, but especially in Scotland, will be deposited in the Library with a copy of the report made by the chief constable of Thames Valley police to the Home Secretary and the police authority after the tragedy in his jurisdiction some years ago? Can copies of various letters on firearms that the Home Office sent to chief constables and the minutes of meetings of the Association of Chief Police Officers and ACPO Scotland on firearms matters be made available? Such information would be of interest to many hon. Members.

I note that the police made the excuse—and Cullen accepted it—that there was no good reason for rescinding Hamilton's firearms certificate. The councils that had certain responsibilities in those matters did not take very much action either over the years whenever Hamilton was in their purview. Nor was action taken—apparently—by welfare authorities, children's officers of councils and various other folk. I wonder why, given the man's history, only the boy scouts spotted him—20 years ago—and got rid of him. They at least got it right while everyone else was getting it wrong. The man had a strange personality and character, and his action at the school was one of unmitigated horror.

I believe that everyone in the House and far beyond understands the murder that is a consequence of violent rage, very often in a domestic situation. One wonders about the statistics on firearms and deaths. How many were the result of such incidents? We can also understand the murder that flows from attempts to get money—the ordinary criminal act, no matter how horrific—which nowadays is very much allied to drugs and the control of drugs sales. Hamilton did not have such reasons. His motive was entirely different. I believe that his motive

[Mr. William Ross]

was vengeance on society and the parents who protected their children from his evil intentions and attentions. His crime was carefully calculated to inflict the maximum hurt not only on the parents but on the society and community in which he lived. Even if he had not had guns, I believe that he would have found some other way of killing those children and himself. Anyone who studies such horrors across the world will know how that could be done.

I conclude, therefore, that although the Bill will accomplish what is described in the long title—at least to some extent—it cannot accomplish its real purpose because the evil that Thomas Hamilton perpetrated had its source in a very wicked heart and brain. Christianity and other great religions have spent many thousands of years trying to deal with that problem without success.

7.37 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I should explain at the outset that although I do not shoot, own a gun or have any sort of relevant declarable interest, I have some very worried constituents.

When my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary moved the Second Reading, he said that it was impossible to overlook that "dreadful event" in Dunblane. One aspect of that dreadful event is the response to those who were bereaved and affected. I judge that that raises two very sensitive issues. First, how should we respond to 16 pairs of bereaved parents in Dunblane? Secondly, how should we in the House respond to the 700,000 or more people who have signed the Snowdrop petition? I fully realise that both questions raise very difficult and emotive issues that most of us would rather not address, but they cannot be ducked if we are to do our parliamentary duty. It follows from that that somebody has to swallow hard and comment. I have a nasty feeling that I am better placed than most to do just that because I, too, have lost a child.

The circumstances of Sarah's death are not really relevant, except to enable me to acknowledge that some hon. Members may see a great difference between a 12-year-old choking to death after her school sports and a five-year-old being dismembered by a madman's gun. Talking to many bereaved parents has convinced me that it is the death rather than the circumstances that matters most, and that leads me to want to make two points from my own experience.

The first is that disagreeing with the instinctive reactions of bereaved parents, their families and their friends is not necessarily heartless. It can be helpful. The second is that it is possible and, I believe, essential to reason constructively with all those who feel closely involved in such a tragedy. I readily admit that disagreeing and reasoning with those who have been touched by tragedy can appear heartless, but—as we are now being asked to legislate because of what happened in Dunblane—we have a duty to consider all of the issues raised, however uncomfortable they make us feel. That is surely why we asked Lord Cullen to investigate on our behalf. I know that some hon. Members believe that backing Lord Cullen's recommendations alone will be unpopular, but I have found that it is possible to convince those with whom it would be unpopular that we care just as deeply while disagreeing with them and some of their proposals.

Let me try to explain, if I can, why we sometimes need to disagree with the instinctive reactions of bereaved parents. When one of your children dies, everything you say and everything you do has but one instinctive objective—to bring your child back. When you finally accept that you cannot bring your child back, you instinctively try to make some positive sense out of an apparently meaningless tragedy. That regularly results in campaigning to establish blame or to change things. All too easily, those campaigns can become obsessive and unreasonable. When they do, the people who are doing the campaigning damage themselves and, in the end, they undermine the legitimate interests of others. We can all think of examples, such as the campaign that followed the death of a nurse who fell from a balcony in Saudi Arabia or the campaign on airport and airline security after the Lockerbie disaster. We can think of many such examples.

Let me make it clear that I am not necessarily arguing that the campaigning post-Dunblane falls into the category of doing harm, but we need to ask the question if only to satisfy ourselves that it does not. Let me also try to explain why we need to ask those who signed the Snowdrop petition to pause for a moment and to reflect. When a child of a friend of yours dies, you too react instinctively. You are desperate to support your friend and you have a sense of guilt for not anticipating the tragedy and doing something to try to prevent it. Because of the awfulness of Dunblane, that sense of involvement, of wanting to help and to support a demand for action spreads far and wide. I rejoice that it does, but we need to ask why. Was it because Dunblane was so mercifully unique? Perhaps we have become hardened to a child a week being killed by a motor vehicle, but we have not become hardened to Dunblane.

As with the bereaved themselves, the instinctive reaction of those who feel involved also needs to be supplemented by quiet thought and discussion with other people. The purpose of intervention needs to be to assist the bereaved to come to terms with what has happened and to help them avoid a downward slide into obsession. Before we vote, therefore, we need to satisfy ourselves that our response to the tragedy in Dunblane and to the bereaved and the petitioners is both supportive and helpful. That usually means, from my experience, warning people against overreaction.

We need to think through our response. Respect for the bereaved and disgust at the crime naturally makes all of us sympathetic to whatever it is that the bereaved want, but our uncomfortable task tonight is to work out what to do in a way that is most likely to help those people in the long term and to avoid overreaction that unreasonably harms others.

When my daughter died, I could easily have campaigned to ban school sports and I suspect, if I had asked them, my friends would have supported me. Fourteen years on, I am certain that I would have been wrong. That campaigning would have destroyed me and prevented some children from enjoying themselves. Is it possible—perhaps we should stop and think—that the same might be true for banning some or all handguns? I have no doubt that some will dismiss the comparison that I seek to make between school sports and handguns. Perhaps the lack of a ban on minibuses after 12 children were killed in a crash in 1994 is a better comparison, because that too makes my point.

All that leads me to reach three conclusions. First, neither sympathy for the bereaved nor guilt at our previous inaction should ever be our yardstick for deciding what to do. Secondly, instinctive reaction is not the only way to help the grieving and those who feel involved. Thirdly, action based on instinct alone is all too often wrong, especially when that response is rushed.

Over the past 14 years I have learnt the hard way that it helps if we allow our heads to guide us as well as our hearts. My heart goes out to the bereaved parents of Dunblane. I know of no words that are adequate to explain how I feel, but my head tells me that we owe it to the memory of those slaughtered innocents to stop and think and to vote against overreaction. However we vote at 10 o'clock, each of us must have more than sympathy with the bereaved and more than support for the petitioners to back whatever decision it is that we make.

7.46 pm

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) and I share some of his emotions—I, too, am a parent who has lost a child—but I depart from many of his arguments because I do not believe that the debate is all about Dunblane: it is also about the control of guns in society in general.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) referred to my Adjournment debate on 3 May 1995, in which I raised the issue of gun control and the keeping of weapons on domestic premises. What my hon. Friend did not know is that for some time before that I had made representations to successive Home Secretaries, through correspondence and orally, on the same issue. I came to the conclusion that gun control was needed because of local incidents. On many occasions over the past two years in and around my constituency, people have lost their lives at the end of legally held firearms. Some irresponsible shooters in my area have advertised the fact that they kept weapons on domestic premises. On more than one occasion, those weapons have been stolen by the criminal fraternity and good people have died.

In May 1995, I made four simple demands. One was that the storage of handguns of any kind on domestic premises should be banned. I also argued that there was a need for a national firearms index, which would track every firearm wherever it was moved legally within the country. I said that details would have to be kept on the police computer. I also demanded strict psychological testing. I must again mention the people who claim to be responsible shooters, yet who cannot keep their mouths shut about where and why they have weapons and what they are supposed to do with them. I further suggested exemplary sentences for people who merely possess illegal weapons, let alone those who use them.

I believe that that debate was fairly constructive, but the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), who was the responsible Minister at the time and who is in his place today, argued vociferously against my suggestions. I do not want to score points in such a debate, but I wish that the Government had moved then, rather than 16 young lives—and the lives of many adults throughout the country—later. They are several lives too late.

The Dunblane tragedy moved us all. It moved many Members of Parliament on from having zero interest in weapons control, firearms et alia, and it moved me on from my four basic demands. I now support a complete ban on the ownership of handguns.

I have spoken to shooters and non-shooters alike, and in my opinion there is no reason not to include .22 rimfire pistols. That seems to be the division between the Government Front Bench and the rest of us. I do not believe that the handgun ban will drive the shooters to buy .22s. Many shooters are saying that it will signal the demise of .22 pistols in any event.

The Liberal spokesman, the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), used the word "dishonesty" to describe the Government's approach to that part of the ban, and he was right. It would be dishonest to ban handguns but leave .22s in the possession of shooters, knowing full well—or at least having a good idea—that the final result was likely to be a de facto ban on .22s with no compensation payable. I should like the Minister to dwell on that thought.

We must now turn our attention to replica guns and deactivated weapons. Many of my contacts in the police tell me that the deactivated weapons market is growing all the time. Weapons are obtained legally in a deactivated form, but I understand that no very detailed expertise is required to reactivate them. There are many people with service experience who can easily do the job.

We cannot leave the debate without talking about shotguns. As one or two Members have already said, we must make a serious attempt to remove shotguns—at least from urban areas, for a start. My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) emphasised that. I recognise the utility of shotguns for certain categories of people, but I do not believe that there should be multiple ownership of shotguns on one licence. The position should be strictly controlled, with one shotgun to one licence.

As for the shooters who have lobbied us, many arguments have been advanced by Conservative Members about what law-abiding and upright citizens they are. No doubt some are. I have seen shooters at my advice bureau and received letters and phone calls from shooters. I even met some who were lobbying Parliament today. Many of them conduct themselves with respect and dignity and argue their case sensibly and without rancour, but there is a vituperative majority—and to say that they are fit to own even a pea-shooter would stretch my generosity.

Finally, I shall address the canard that most of the responsible shooters use: that guns do not kill people—people kill people. The truth is that people too often use guns to kill people. Fewer guns in society will result in fewer tragedies.

7.55 pm

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) is still in his place as I have listened to his speeches over many years and I thought that his contribution this evening was admirable, sensible, calm and reasoned. It touched the emotions and hearts of many people here, and I think that it will do the same for those outside. I shall say a few words about the Dunblane parents later, but I must say at the outset that my hon. Friend spoke with great sense and reason. The whole House should be grateful to him.

[Mr. John Carlisle]

I feel that on this subject my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench have got it wrong. Their intentions have encountered an enormous amount of opposition both outside this place and, as they will have heard, from the Conservative Benches—although a muted response from the Opposition.

The description "knee-jerk legislation" must be applied. When Cullen finally reported, the Home Secretary said that the response would be held back until after the party conferences—a deal that was undone by the Labour party. Then there was a knee-jerk response. At 3.30 there were statements, which were not available to Members until that moment, and by 3.31 the Home Secretary had announced that there would be legislation.

One of the tragedies is that there has been no time to discuss legislation in a reasoned and honest way—almost until today, although the subject was touched on in the debate on the Queen's Speech. Had my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government not only heard what our colleagues have said this evening, and will presumably continue to say, but seen the welter of correspondence and realised the good sense of those who have written, they might have changed their ideas.

The problem was that the Government gave the impression that all would be well, but that nothing should be said until Cullen had reported. Many of the shooting lobbies took the same view. Yet as soon as Cullen reported, legislation was bounced upon the House. I regret that, because if the intended legislation is passed we shall all have become victims of the sins of one awful man, which will affect many thousands of innocent citizens.

Perhaps the Bill should be renamed the Firearms (Confiscation) Bill, because of the remarkable fact that the Government intend to confiscate legitimately held private property—property that in many cases has been held for scores of years. Their action will risk the livelihoods of many thousands of people and put many legitimate business people out of business and into poverty.

The tragedy of the legislation is, I regret to say, that it will do nothing to prevent a similar event from occurring again. During his visit to Dunblane, the Prime Minister said:

"You cannot legislate against this sort of incident."

He was absolutely right. That is why we must ask the questions.

Why have the Government chosen to go beyond Cullen? Cullen sat for six weeks, heard comprehensive evidence and spent about £1 million collecting that evidence. No one begrudges that money, but having established some sensible reasoned arguments, the Government then abandoned the crux of the argument—regrettably, for some kind of political reason. Why have we not accepted the lessons of the past? Why do we not remember what a farce the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 has become because, like the measures passed in 1988 following Hungerford, it was rushed legislation? Why have this Government, of all Governments, given in to the various pressures of blackmail and emotion that have been heaped on all of us who are involved in this argument, and why have they listened to those arguments instead of the arguments of reason?

Obviously, most of us support Lord Cullen's very sensible recommendations.

Mr. John Cummings (Easington): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlisle: The hon. Gentleman will understand why I cannot do so.

Lord Cullen called, rightly, for stricter scrutiny, the need for which everyone would acknowledge. He called for a greater number of referees for firearm certificates—again, people acknowledge and accept that recommendation. I agree with the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), who said that GPs should be involved in some way in determining the fitness of certificate holders. Lord Cullen also called for greater police involvement, which we would all support, provided that the police behave somewhat more sensibly than the Central Scotland police behaved in respect of Mr. Hamilton.

At no point in his report does Lord Cullen advocate the banning of all guns. He says:

"I do not consider that the banning of handguns . . . or . . . of shooting clubs would be justified."

Her Majesty's Government have effectively destroyed pistol shooting. Many of us who have visited shooting clubs either prior to Dunblane or in the past few weeks will be aware of the devastating effect that the Bill will have on those clubs. The Government themselves admit that the majority of clubs will close because there will be no point in their continuing to exist.

My own party has shattered the faith of many who believe in Conservative policies, and we have alienated thousands upon thousands of voters. I will not say that the Labour party has gained electoral favour by its antics, but many Conservatives cannot understand why their Government have acted in this way.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) and many others, I have received a massive postbag—the biggest that I have ever had in my 17 years in this place—and the letters come from a great variety of people. Approximately a fifth come from Scotland, and many are from Labour supporters. In addition, my correspondents include people who are disabled and people who are not involved in the sport of shooting. They watch our debates with incredulity.

To an extent, emotion has dominated the argument. That is why I felt it necessary to say to the parents of Dunblane that by trying to be judge and jury in this case they almost put themselves beyond the argument. That is not as it should be, because they are crucial to the argument and everyone sympathises with the suffering that they have endured. I suggest to them that their accusations—such as calling some members of the shooting lobby "murderers" and, like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), calling shooting people "perverts"—do not help in the arguments arising from the Dunblane tragedy. Similarly, in announcing that they were to put up a candidate against my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland they did not endear themselves to many who wanted to keep the issue out of the political arena.

The Labour party, described as "graverobbers" by one of my correspondents, has—with one or two honourable exceptions—jumped on the bandwagon. It has been

interesting tonight to see that the arguments of those who oppose shotguns—especially for youngsters—are now gathering pace in that party. The people should be warned.

The Bill will have a devastating effect on pistol shooters everywhere, including those in my constituency, and on gun dealers—not only those who deal only in pistols and rifles, but shotgun dealers, who say that their business is already suffering because of the sentiment engendered by Dunblane and the Cullen inquiry. Of course shotgun dealers will not qualify for any form of compensation, but it must be acknowledged that they are feeling the cold draught of this legislation. The extraordinary thing is that many shooters will now say that holding .22 guns is hardly worth it. I do not entirely support their argument, but I can understand it.

We have to do two things tonight. First, the Government should go back to Cullen's recommendations and stick at them. We can then pass legislation with virtually no dissension by those who believe in logic and reason. I do not believe that the Government will do that, but I shall continue to fight for it. Secondly, the Government should make absolutely sure that the scope of the compensation is much wider than has been offered so far.

The legislation is illogical, unfair and ill thought-out and if some Members go into the Lobby to vote against the Government tonight, it will be the Government's own fault.

8.5 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I was hoping that, when talking about the Dunblane parents, the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) might have found it within himself to apologise for some of the remarks that he made several weeks ago. For his information, the Dunblane parents are not "hysterical"—given the circumstances, I have never meet a group of calmer and more rational people and their arguments have been commendable for their reasoned approach. The hon. Gentleman's remarks this evening were more moderate than those of a few weeks ago, but they were, none the less, offensive.

It was interesting that the hon. Gentleman started by paying tribute to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), who made an emotional speech which touched many of us. I know the hon. Member for Spelthorne and he would never have expressed himself in the clumsy and offensive way that the hon. Member for Luton, North did a few weeks ago.

The impact of this debate will be felt strongly in Scotland and, indeed, in other parts of the country. People were, rightly, touched by the Dunblane tragedy and that feeling has hardened into a determination to try to prevent that sort of tragedy from happening again. Everyone who argues that case realises that there can be no absolute guarantees, but we can move the boundary somewhat and make it less likely that such a tragedy will happen again. That makes the case for a complete ban on handguns.

I have listened to Conservative Members relate in the debate some of the things that have been said to them. They should remember that a highly personalised campaign of slurs and innuendo was waged against the key Snowdrop campaigners by some elements in the gun lobby. There is no doubt about that—their actions and words are on the record. Equally, some members of the gun lobby have expressed themselves fairly while still putting their arguments with vigour—many of my constituents have done so. It does not help—especially when calm and reasoned debate is called for—to have those accusations flowing back and forth across the Chamber, instead of hon. Members trying to identify the case on its merits.

No system of checking, however rigorous, can prevent every unsuitable person from gaining access to guns. It has been said in the debate that the police made mistakes, as if that were an argument against a complete ban on the civilian use of handguns. The fact that the police make mistakes is one of the arguments for such a ban. No system of checking is foolproof and any system that depends on people is essentially flawed in that human beings, including the police, make mistakes.

Hon. Members have spoken about sports and I hope that alternatives can be devised so that people can continue to practise their sport. Some of my constituents have said that they could not understand why some pistol shooters have to use extremely powerful weapons—they ask why the same skill and precision cannot be expressed through new technology, perhaps laser technology. I hope that such possibilities will be investigated. At the end of the day, however, people's pursuit of a sport must be a lesser point than the issue of public safety.

Our job, as representatives of the people, is to square our actions with our conscience. That is why it would be wrong were the House to allow the substantial loophole in respect of handguns as proposed by the Government. We should start from the principle that no one should own a handgun and only then should we discuss the exceptions. The position adopted by the Japanese in this respect is enlightening. In that whole country, there are 58 handgun licences. Hon. Members will be aware of the Home Office statistics, which point to some correlation between the number of legal firearms in circulation and the incidence of firearm homicide.

The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), in an interesting speech, made the reasonable point that one cannot prove anything absolutely through international comparisons. One comparison should, however, be introduced into the debate. In the United States, which has some of the most lax gun legislation, there are 27 times as many firearm killings per million than in the United Kingdom. In Japan, where the basic principle is no handguns, the killings number one eighth of the UK total. For all the differences in culture and experience in the international comparisons, those figures are very compelling.

I am angry that the Government have decided to whip their Back Benchers on this issue. It is fair to contrast their position on this issue with the decision to allow a free vote on corporal punishment in schools. It is an insult to the intelligence of voters to say that using the cane in England is a matter of conscience, but using a handgun is not.

This debate has shown up the real reason why the Government intend to whip Members through the Lobby during the next week. There have been many speeches—mainly from the Opposition Benches, but some from the Government side—arguing for the complete ban of handguns. Many Conservative Members have argued that the Government have gone too far. However, support for the Government position from the Back Benches has been

[Mr. Alex Salmond]

noticeable by its absence. That is why the Government feel that they can sustain their position only by the use of the Whips on this, an issue that, above all others, should be one of conscience. The Government's position is a fraud—an uneasy compromise, which has been patched together with no intellectual coherence and which depends on the Whips Office to hold it together.

As has been said, the clearest evidence was presented to Cullen—in some cases, by the gun lobby itself—to show that the option of gun club storage was unsound and unsafe. The quotations are there for all to see in the Cullen report. I was convinced by those representations, because they were widespread and they were backed up by the police.

The logic of the Government's central proposals is impossible to fathom. They have drawn a line at .22 calibre weapons in the full knowledge that such an arbitrary decision and division have been generally discredited. As has been said, a .22 handgun is as deadly as a high-calibre weapon. In some cases, it is the weapon of choice for killers. It was the weapon used to assassinate Bobby Kennedy, it was used in the attempt on President Reagan's life and it is the weapon responsible for the largest number of killings in the United States. Indeed, it is favoured for its size, ease of carrying and concealment and efficiency. The common term for some .22s in the United States is the "Saturday night special". Lord Cullen emphasised that point in his report, saying:

"In terms of pure precision the .22 calibre was capable of inherent accuracy beyond the skill of the shooter. Whether high accuracy is obtained depends on the quality of the particular gun, the quality of the ammunition and the skills of the shooter. The .22 rimfire represented the highest precision cartridge which was available. It was highly evolved."

People will not accept the continued existence of 40,000 legally held handguns or the bizarre decision to allow multi-fire handguns to continue to be in this legal group. Let the House be under no illusion: some .22 weapons can fire even more rapidly than the 9 mm Browning that Hamilton used. If any lesson is to be learnt from Thomas Hamilton's actions, it is surely that rapid-fire weapons are the most deadly. Hamilton fired a hail of 106 bullets in a matter of seconds—that damage from a handgun should surely never be allowed again. Of course hon. Members have a point when they say that a madman could take a machete or another weapon and try to inflict damage, but few other weapons can inflict the carnage of a rapid-fire handgun.

The Secretary of State for Scotland suggests that the measures in the Bill amount to a virtual ban and that gun clubs will be forced out of existence. If that is so, would it not be better to face the issue honestly, rather than by back door prohibition? The Home Secretary is singing a different tune. He has spoken of the possibility of new gun clubs coming into existence to meet the new regulations. We are entitled to ask, what is the Government view—is it effective prohibition, or the rejuvenation of gun clubs?

There is to be compensation and, like many hon. Members, I accept that point on principle. There should be compensation, but I would think it ill if compensation were used so that people could trade into new .22 weapons. The Government cannot have it both ways. The only effective handgun control is a handgun ban and they should know that public opinion will not tolerate money being used to bring new .22 handguns into people's possession.

I hope that hon. Members will find the strength to do what is right by their constituents and by the people of Dunblane.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Time is up. Mr. Rupert Allason.

8.15 pm

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): After the appalling tragedy of Hungerford, the House was determined to rush to legislate. I regret having supported that legislation at the behest of my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), who was then the Home Secretary. I did support it, however, and it banned a type of weapon. That was what I believed that I was legislating for. The reality was that that legislation placed an enormous and expensive burden on entirely legitimate shotgun certificate holders.

This is another occasion on which the House is being invited to rush through ill-prepared legislation. The fact that the money resolution was withdrawn this afternoon, shows the lack of proper preparation and consultation. This is not a choice between the right to life and the right to sport; it is a measure that penalises and stigmatises a wholly law-abiding section of the community.

I must now turn to the horrendous tragedy of Dunblane. My criticism of the present law is the built-in bias in favour of the applicant, to which hon. Members have referred, and the weight against revocation on appeal to the court. That crucial issue is key to the administration of a proper and effective control regime, which is what all responsible shooters desire.

The description given by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) of the police procedures examined by Lord Cullen is comprehensively contradicted by the report. I must remind the House of precisely what Lord Cullen said. Thomas Hamilton was regarded as

"a scheming, devious and deceitful person who was not to be trusted."

It is true that Hamilton first acquired a firearms certificate in 1977, but he had deliberately and consistently deceived the police since then, as is clear from paragraph 6.30 of the report. As for ammunition, Lord Cullen considered it "strange" that Hamilton was ever allowed to buy large quantities of bullets or, indeed, additional weapons of the same calibre. Lord Cullen said that that

"does not inspire me with confidence".

If anyone believes that the Cullen report absolves the police, let him take another look. The report is a damning indictment. In paragraph 6.42, the author refers to the Holden memorandum, saying that it

"should have been placed in the firearms file . . . but this was not done."

Detective Sergeant Hughes said that Hamilton was

"an unsavoury character and unstable personality",

that he had

"an extremely unhealthy interest in young boys",

and that he was

"an unsuitable person to possess a firearm certificate".

Paragraph 6.45 of the report states:

"Detective Constable Taylor believed that Thomas Hamilton had been guilty of criminal conduct",

but that did not give him any

"concern about his fitness to hold a firearm certificate."

Paragraph 6.47, relating to the 1995 renewal signed by the deputy chief constable, states that the latter, in his evidence to Lord Cullen, said that he spent "only a few moments" on the renewal:

"Only the certificate was before him. He said he did not apply his mind to the question of whether Hamilton was a fit and proper person".

No wonder he resigned!

Consider the criticism in paragraph 6.62 of the way in which the deputy chief constable gave evidence, which differed over two days, on whether Hamilton was fit to hold a firearms certificate.

The entire system administered by Scottish Central police was flawed. Lord Cullen talks of

"a glaring deficiency in the operation of the force's information system"—

that is found in paragraph 6.72. In paragraph 6.73, Lord Cullen refers to the criminal intelligence check that should have been conducted in February 1992 on the renewal—it was never executed. In paragraph 6.78, he cites

"a disturbing picture of the operation of the decision-making process. The senior officer who had the responsibility of determining the outcome of Thomas Hamilton's application had nothing put before him but the new firearms certificate to be signed. In the absence of any indication to the contrary he assumed that it was appropriate for him to sign."

The left hand clearly did not know what the right hand was doing.

The whole report is a damning indictment of the way in which the police exercise their powers under current legislation. I recognise that there was confusion about how the law operated in Scotland. I recognise, too, that there was great anxiety about the benefit of the doubt always being given to the applicant. The solution is to reverse the balance, leaving it in favour of any police objection.

In paragraph 7.17, Lord Cullen concluded:

"I do not recommend that such a wholesale prohibition should be considered."

I tend to agree.

I welcome the Home Secretary's concession this afternoon to extending compensation to auxiliary equipment. Over the weekend, I met more of my constituents who are firearms certificate holders. They certainly do not conform to the image portrayed in the smears that have been aimed at the gun lobby. Those people have held certificates for 20 or 30 years and have been obliged to show responsible police officers that they are indeed fit and proper persons.

What am I to say to one of my constituents who has £3,000 worth of reloading equipment for making the ammunition for his weapons? There is also a gun dealer in my constituency, operating from home, who has invested thousands of pounds in security precautions for his house. Will he be compensated? Absolutely not.

The only equitable approach, if we are to legislate on this issue, is to make certain that everyone adversely affected, including the clubs, is compensated in full. No such proposals are in the Bill, nor are they in prospect. In my judgment, therefore, the Bill is unjust; furthermore, it is un-Conservative. Accordingly, I commend the amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Weston–super–Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) to the House.

8.23 pm

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South–West): Like other hon. Members, I have read the Cullen report. Reading the account of how Hamilton committed his atrocious act, I was moved to tears—as, I am sure, were other hon. Members. I am not ashamed to admit that. They were tears of anger, disbelief, horror and pity for those poor children.

Against whom should the natural human reaction of anger be directed? The anger of the children's parents and others has been directed against the means that Hamilton used to commit the atrocity—the handgun; more specifically, the repeating full-bore weapon. The motive must be anger; otherwise logic would dictate banning all guns, especially shotguns, which are the firearms most often used in crime and murder.

Taken to its logical extreme, however, this natural reaction is unworkable. Some firearms are used as legitimate tools. Many categories of firearm that would be encompassed by such a reaction are plainly harmless to public safety, such as antiques and even the nail guns used in construction work.

This time, unlike the aftermath of the Hungerford tragedy, we had a public inquiry conducted by an erudite judge who had the advantage of having all the information to hand and the time to consider every aspect, including school safety and control of firearms.

Back in 1988, we debated the response to the dreadful events in Hungerford perpetrated by Michael Ryan, who supposedly possessed legally held firearms—but in dubious circumstances. In that debate, I suggested three measures that were not taken up by the Government. First, I asked for controls on the shooting gallery style of club which exercised no control over its members. That at least was implemented about two years later, although I was not given the credit for it—not that that worries me.

My second suggestion was for a statutory examination of a firearm applicant's health and social security records. Thirdly, I suggested a reduction in an applicant's grounds for appeal against a police decision to refuse an application.

Taken together, those measures might—might—have prevented Thomas Hamilton from possessing legal firearms. Of course he could still have tried to obtain one of the estimated 1.5 million illegal firearms in this country. I take no pleasure in saying, "I told you so," but I did.

There followed the even more horrendous incident at Dunblane in March this year; yet, despite an inquiry costing more than £1 million, the Government are entering on the same course of action as they did after Hungerford. At least this time they are tightening up on the ownership of firearms by agreeing to Cullen's 23 well-considered recommendations in that regard, but they should not ignore the 24th, to which I shall come later.

The Firearms Consultative Committee, which was set up in 1988 and of which I recently became a lay member, has recommended at least 38 minor changes to the law; it

[Mr. Martyn Jones]

has also recommended creating a national body to co-ordinate the issuing and monitoring of firearms certification. That idea was turned down flat, while the other proposals were held in abeyance until the time came for primary legislation. We have that opportunity today, but the committee's submissions are still being ignored.

What is needed is not a hasty amendment to the—already much amended—1968 Act but a root-and-branch review of the whole issue; otherwise, we are in grave danger of another equivalent of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, now widely acknowledged as unworkable.

At least this time an in-depth inquiry was held and Lord Cullen recommended 24 worthwhile ways of improving the system—23 of them are rightly being implemented, but why are we not considering setting up a national licensing board that would be party to all the information that the police could obtain, co-ordinating inquiries on a standardised basis? If such a body had existed, it would have taken away the onerous responsibility on the police to check up on the membership of the clubs of which Hamilton claimed to be a member. It seems that there is evidence that those clubs were not appropriate to the sort of firearms which he was granted permission to obtain.

Going back to Lord Cullen's 24 recommendations, in paragraph 9.112 he recommended that firearms should not be kept in one place as workable firearms. The Government suggested that that was not a feasible option. I strongly suggest that it is. Virtually all firearms can be stripped down to their component parts. In the case of self-loading pistols, the slide mechanism could be taken home. It is not possible to obtain a duplicate slide without a firearms certificate endorsement. There is therefore no possibility of circumvention of that rule. The same applies to revolvers; the cylinder could be taken home.

The cause of public safety would be much better served. The sport of full-bore target shooting could continue, but if that is not the Government's wish, the proposal could be applied to .22 pistols. That has many merits, not the least of which is that the tiny minority of shooters who are driven by some kind of American-style macho image would have nothing to posture with at home. Equally, criminals and terrorists would have nothing to steal from target clubs.

The Government again insist on legislating against one type of firearm. They must compensate not only those people who will lose their often valuable firearms, but dealers who will lose their hobby and their livelihood.

If the Government are determined to legislate against one type of firearm, they should go further in the cause of public safety and insist that .22 pistols are disabled in the way that Lord Cullen recommended. Shooters do not want people like Hamilton to have workable firearms. There is one genuine way in which the Bill could prevent a repeat of Dunblane or Hungerford: through the disablement of firearms.

8.31 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): The House will, I am sure, acknowledge the expertise of the hon. Member for Clwyd, South–West (Mr. Jones). When it comes to firearms, he knows what he is talking about, unlike some hon. Members who have spoken in the debate.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) was the first person speaking today to say that the use and ownership of firearms was a privilege, not a right. That is important. We all have the right to apply for a firearms certificate, but it is a privilege to be granted one.

I have experienced that privilege for most of my adult life. It is also a privilege of mine to be a co-opted member on the executive council of the National Rifle Association and to be the president of the Palace of Westminster Rifle Club, which includes a pistol range. The range has three .22 pistols, which will continue to be legal if the Bill is passed as drafted, and one .32 revolver, which will have to be surrendered. I hope that the club will comply with the clause 16 provisions for licensing, which may be too onerous for some other clubs to meet. To hon. Members who would like to know more about firearms and their use, let me say that the club is always open for those who want to visit it.

We all reacted in much the same way to the horrible events in Dunblane on 13 March: horror at the shooting of 17 innocent people; incredulity that a man like Hamilton could possess and use firearms, apparently legally; immediate and continuing heartfelt sympathy for the families bereaved at the school and in the community of Dunblane; and lastly, a determination to do everything possible to reduce the chances of such a thing ever happening again.

I join in commending Lord Cullen for his inquiry and his report. I find little fault with his conclusions and recommendations.

Initially, after Dunblane, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary rightly said that he would resist a knee-jerk reaction to the tragedy, unlike some people. He said that the Government would wait for Lord Cullen's report and give serious consideration to his proposals for changes in the law. Unfortunately, having resisted the initial knee-jerk, he has knee-jerked to the Cullen report. He would have done better to enact the Cullen recommendations, as he is doing, and to publish a consultation paper on anything further that he might do, rather than being caught up in the continuing tidal wave of emotion whipped up by the media.

Why did Hamilton possess weapons and ammunition, apparently legally? Had he lived in my county, Hampshire, there is no way that he would ever have been granted a firearms certificate, or, if he had, it certainly would not have been renewed. There might even have been a civil case to revoke it. I am glad that the Bill provides for the revocation of certificates.

Hamilton was investigated by the police seven times and no action was taken against him. He obtained his firearms certificate by deception. He did not belong to or attend a gun club.

Following the Hungerford shootings and the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988, the United Kingdom has had some of the toughest gun laws in the world. Some may say that they are still not tough enough, but I say that they are not enforced adequately to prevent a psychopath like Hamilton from slipping through the net. Those shortcomings have been addressed by Lord Cullen, and my right hon. and learned Friend is right to seek to implement almost all his recommendations, but I think that my right hon. and learned Friend goes too far, too soon in the Bill.

It is unnecessary to ban all large-calibre pistols, leaving only the .22 rimfire, which is to be stored and used at club premises. The way that the provisions will be implemented is unjust. They will result in 57,000 law-abiding citizens being made to look guilty and being wrongly deprived of the privilege of continuing their sport of pistol target shooting.

Our postbags are a litmus test of public opinion. In my bag, the proportion of letters opposing the Bill is 5:1. We have all been impressed over the past few weeks by the lobby of Parliament and visits to our constituency surgeries. We have seen the admirable people whom we will deprive of their sport.

Last week, when the gun lobby came to Parliament, I wondered whether the Royal British Legion, rather than shooting sportsmen, had come to see us. Those people were decent, patriotic and well turned out. They were wearing their blazers, badges and regimental ties. There were young and old among them. They were the sort of people whom we saw on parade on Remembrance day and who observed the two-minute silence yesterday.

If the Bill proceeds, the compensation proposals will compound the injustice. If law-abiding citizens are to be deprived by Parliament of lawfully held assets, they must be properly and fully compensated: anything less would be legalised robbery. The fact that the Home Office believes that only £25 million to £50 million is required for compensation shows that it is either hopelessly ill advised or determined to act unjustly.

The realistic figure, with weapons valued at about £500 each, is closer to £150 million. If, as is now proposed, dedicated accessories are added—including holsters, ammunition-loading equipment, spare magazines and other pieces of equipment—the total compensation figure could approach £500 million. That money could be far better spent on the police and enforcement of the firearms laws. That figure allows nothing at all for the 100 or so pistol clubs, which will almost all have to close, or for the 2,000 dealers and gunsmiths who may be put out of business by loss of assets, if not by clause 16.

Unless the Bill is radically amended, it will do nothing to enhance the reputation of Parliament. It seems as if my right hon. and learned Friend has considered only one side of the debate. As John Stuart Mill said:

"There is always hope—when people are forced to listen to both sides; it is when they attend only to one, that errors harden into prejudice. The quiet suppression of half the truth is the formidable evil."

Perhaps the House will decide that 57,000 law-abiding citizens are a small enough minority to be used as a scapegoat and sacrificed to the god of populist opinion. I was not elected to Parliament to sacrifice my judgment to the opinion of the majority. We are here to defend the rights and privileges of individuals and minorities, which is why we should support the reasoned amendment.

8.39 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): There are two separate issues before the House this evening: first, the appropriate rules for gun ownership in response to the massacre of innocents at Dunblane—I, with some hesitation, am prepared to accept a complete ban—and, secondly, the issue of compensation. I shall devote my speech to the latter issue.

I shall use a constituency example to illustrate the hardship that the Bill is likely to cause unless there is a more generous financial resolution. I shall then set out the principles of law that I believe are applicable in this case and argue that Parliament must be seen to respond in a fair and a democratic manner. .

Obviously, shooting centres are likely to be affected most by the legislation. The largest commercial shooting range in Wales, Shooters of Swansea, is located in my constituency. It opened five years ago and is owned by Mr. Adrian Morris and his family. The range was built with the encouragement of the local authority, Swansea city council, which provided the site and the infrastructure, and it was supported by the Sports Council for Wales.

It is a family-run business, with personal guarantees from the family, who invested substantial sums. The family have no other business interests and there is no alternative use for the building. The Government's proposals would remove more than 80 per cent. of turnover, making the business not commercially viable—in effect, the family would face certain ruin. All machinery and special equipment would be made redundant and their livelihood destroyed. In pursuing a deemed public interest, does the Home Office see no obligation to protect people such as the Morris family in my constituency? They are the innocent victims of a measure that has been advanced for the public good.

I hope that the Home Office will consider seriously certain propositions of law when determining the extent of the compensation proposals. If it adopts a minimalist position, it will certainly face legal challenge. A state must ensure that its domestic law conforms with accepted legal obligations; so what key principles are relevant and should guide legislation in this case? The first is the principle of equality.

Where possible, our legislation should comply with the principle of equal treatment under the law. That principle finds expression in several cases, both domestic and European—notably in the skimmed milk powder case that was reported in 1977 in European Court Report 1311. The argument, if applied to the Bill, is that to compensate only the owners of firearms would offend the principle of equality of treatment in circumstances where others who suffered a direct loss from the ban were not so compensated also.

In terms of human rights, it may be argued that not to compensate certain categories of those who suffer loss would be a violation of their fundamental human rights, partly because it deprives them of a property right and partly because it infringes the right to free pursuit of an economic activity. The 1974 case of Nold *v.* Commission, European Court Reports 491, is relevant here. It would be a violation of those principles if vested rights were interfered with without compensation—although I accept that the damage alleged must be "a sufficiently direct consequence" of the act.

There is a close analogy between this case and the acquisition and expropriation of property cases. I refer the Home Office to the 1986 case of Lithgow *v.* United Kingdom, which appeared in European Human Rights Reports 335. The judgment states at paragraph 120:

"not only must a measure depriving a person of his property pursue, on the facts as well as in principle, a legitimate aim 'in the public interest' but there must be a reasonable relationship of

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

proportionality between the means employed and the aim sought to be realised . . . the notion of the 'fair balance' that must be struck between the demands of the general interest of the community and the requirements of the protection of the individual's fundamental rights. The requisite balance will not be found if the person concerned has had to bear 'an unconditional and excessive burden'.

Clearly compensation terms are material to the assessment as to whether a fair balance has been struck between the various interests at stake and notably, whether or not a disproportionate burden has been imposed on the person who has been deprived of his possessions.

The Court further accepts that the taking of property without payment of an amount reasonably related to its value would normally constitute a disproportionate interference which could not be considered justifiable under Article 1."

Those principles are essentially enshrined in European Community law and in human rights legislation and conventions, but many of them owe their origins to related common law principles. I hope that the Home Office will consider those principles seriously, as they should be a guide to the compensation provisions in the Bill. I do not suggest that ignoring such principles would necessarily provide a remedy in law, but I hope that Ministers will examine them and be sufficiently troubled by them to modify their response.

In this case, principles of law coincide with the principles of justice and fairness valued by ordinary citizens. People accept that gun regulations should be tightened in this legislation, but most do not believe that others should as a result be deprived of their livelihoods without compensation in the way that the Government have proposed. Taxpayers expect the Government to be hard-nosed in assessing compensation and to insist upon normal principles of remoteness and mitigation of damages. However, it would be wrong to deprive people of their livelihoods without adequate compensation.

8.46 pm

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): There are occasions when legislation comes before the House and I am uncertain about whether it will achieve its stated objectives. On other occasions—such as this—I have a gut feeling that we are dealing with a problem in entirely the wrong way.

All hon. Members are united in their grief over the tragedy at Dunblane. We also recognise that, whatever measures are implemented, no one can guarantee 100 per cent. that the Dunblane tragedy will not be repeated in one form or another, involving guns or other deadly methods. We are dealing with maniacs—they are always lurking somewhere in society—but we must do what we can to tighten the regulations and avoid a recurrence of the Thomas Hamilton episode.

We all recognise that gun clubs throughout the country are run responsibly; their members are responsible people. A great strength of this country is the way in which those with common interests band together to form organisations and committees, with a chairman, perhaps a president, a secretary and a treasurer. Such groups are the backbone of this country: they are well organised and they take their responsibilities very seriously. The same is true of gun clubs, and we should acknowledge that fact.

This country's marksmen and their achievements often go unrecognised. League tables showing the total number of medals won in shooting events at the Olympic games since 1896 place Britain fourth in the world. Many of our gun clubs provide those marksmen who win those successes for this country, and they get very little credit for it.

The core debate in this afternoon's deliberations is whether a ban or dismantlement of weapons would be the best and the right thing to do. The Cullen report takes some seven pages to express the advice that Lord Cullen took from firearms experts, dealers and people involved in the industry. He concluded that, short of a ban, he would recommend the dismantlement of weapons, and for those that cannot be dismantled he would recommend the fitting of a barrel blocking device. That goes without question. It is comprehensively explained and understood in the report.

The Government's response was that they

"were not convinced that a barrel block or similar device could not be removed by a determined individual and the Government does not therefore believe that it could rely on such a measure. It is also not certain that the removal of key components for the types of weapons where this is appropriate would be practical."

That flies entirely in the face of the Cullen report. It is based on the evidence of the Forensic Science Service. Its report is a letter, of about a page and a quarter in length. It deals with a number of issues about shotguns that are not relevant to the issue, and it is signed by one person, Mr. Warlow. That is the only evidence that the Government have taken on board to contravene the evidence that the Cullen report has provided. I do not think that that is satisfactory. The amendment speaks of the lack of evidence. The evidence from which I have just quoted became available only during the course of the debate, although it was issued on 16 October.

I am convinced that the Bill has been prepared, in a sense, as a response to press comment and to the emotion that has been stoked up by hon. Members on both sides of the House, and it is unwise to proceed down the road that has been determined. The 40,000 weapons that would be left in the hands of individuals would have to be stored in clubs, which are primarily in areas away from habitation, in isolated parts of the countryside, by and large, in old gravel pits or wherever. In order for the weapons to be stored in a gun club, the gun clubs would have to ensure that they have reinforced walls, safes, strong perimeter fences, burglar alarms, access control, including metal detectors, and regular and stringent inspection arrangements. The cost would be so prohibitive that I do not believe that gun clubs could survive.

I do not believe that it would be sensible to provide for a great arsenal of stored weapons, however secure they may appear to be, when the club is probably used only once or twice a week or at the weekends. Such arsenals would be an open invitation to burglars, if they were inclined to obtain weapons in that way.

Many of Lord Cullen's suggestions that the Government have accepted are indeed sensible. They rely on common sense and reasoned judgment. One of the areas that we should look at is referees for licence applicants. Two referees are now accepted as being desirable, but it would be sensible if a doctor were one of the referees. I do not think that it would be practical for doctors to give a mental report on the applicant, but at least if they had any doubts about his stability that would be reflected in their reference. I would rather that were included.

The costs of this exercise are escalating. This has been a very expensive afternoon for the Home Secretary. I agree that the people who will lose their livelihoods and weapons as a result of the Bill must be properly compensated, but the costs may reach £200 million if we stay with what is proposed in the Bill. I believe that that will be the wrong thing to do. We can spend that money in a different way to help to ensure that all the regulations are complied with. We can ensure that weapons are dismantled so that they cannot be used until the two parts are put together at a gun club. That is a thoroughly sensible proposal, and we can embrace a whole range of weapons—all the weapons—under that umbrella. That will be a much safer and much better way to go about things.

8.55 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): After listening to the debate, I have a problem as I am greatly attracted to the argument, analysis and tone of the speeches of hon. Members who have spoken in favour of a total ban, including my hon. Friends the Members for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) and for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin). I do not, however, accept their conclusion.

I often do not like the argument, analysis and tone of the speeches made by Conservative Members who are close to the gun lobby, but I am reaching the same conclusion as them—but not because of their arguments. There are often better arguments than the ones made by people in the gun lobby, who are pursuing their present direction because they cannot take another. At one stage, they did not want any legislation to be introduced, but that game is now up so they must deal with Cullen's recommendations on the dismantling of guns and their separation, whereby one part will be stored in gun clubs and another in a person's home.

I shall not vote with the gun lobby, as I call it, by voting for their reasoned amendment or against the Second Reading, but in Committee I will support amendments that are in line with early-day motion 136, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), who expressed the position quite carefully and sensibly.

We all owe a considerable debt to Lord Cullen, and it is unfortunate that we have never had a full discussion of his report, but have merely moved into the White Paper and the Bill and have therefore changed the ground considerably.

The Government have accepted 23 of Lord Cullen's recommendations—all but the key recommendation about what should be done with handguns. He asks only for consideration. He has two major positions: the dismantling of guns, which has been explained by other hon. Members, and the fall-back position of a total ban. I am attracted to Cullen's position in connection with this. If we do not achieve the dismantling of guns, that might make the case for a total ban. It is unfortunate that the Government have dealt with Cullen's key proposal merely by a one-line response in the White Paper. We have had little more than that from the Home Secretary today.

What I say is bound to be misinterpreted and misunderstood. I am anti-gun: I was on the media's list of people who would provide an anti-gun comment. However, I am for an amendment that might come from early-day motion 136, because the anti-gun position has moved too far with its absolutist notions about a total ban. I do not think that it is incompatible to be anti-gun and to be in favour of dismantling.

I am for tackling and seeking effectively to overcome the gun culture. I am referring not only to the gun culture in the media—television violence and so on—but to the culture in which people are hooked on this activity. We cannot suddenly stop that culture. We must detach people by putting forward alternative views. Legislation can help, but it is not the sole solution.

I have fears about a total ban, although I know that that was the second option proposed in the Cullen report, and I may be obliged to accept that view in certain circumstances. Those who advocate a total ban are arguing for prohibition—that term has been used by hon. Members. We should closely consider the lessons of prohibition and the fears created by it. We would destroy people's pastimes and activities in a stroke. We should have tried to prevent those pastimes through education, but it has occurred, and to change that in one fell swoop would cause problems.

We have discussed compensation for people who would have to hand in their guns and for those in the trade, who are reasonable and respectable people who need to be able to plan for the future and move out of that area if it is no longer likely to sustain them.

The Government want a partial ban. That would leave stocks at gun clubs, which would create many problems. The position taken by Cullen could be used by the Government, because .22 calibre guns could be dismantled and the parts held separately. That could be the subject of another amendment for us to consider in Committee.

How have we moved to a position in which we are in favour of a total ban? In June, the Dunblane Snowdrop petition asked for guns to be held at clubs, and for firing mechanisms to be held separately. I sent press releases to local newspapers in support of that position. In July, the Labour minority on the Select Committee on Home Affairs were in favour of the banning of handguns with a qualification. Its report says:

> "However, it may be that particular gun clubs at particular locations might be able to demonstrate that guns for use at the club could be securely kept, at a central point, in such a way as to preserve the safety of the public. Where this is so, we consider that exceptions to the general ban might be made."

Conservative Members referred to the famous letter from my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson). I sent similar letters, because the Labour party's position at that time was that there should be a ban on handguns being kept at home, not that there should be a total ban.

The alternative position should be considered not only by people associated with gun clubs and with the gun culture, but by the rest of us who are concerned about general developments in society.

9.3 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): It is an oft quoted maxim that sensational cases make bad law. We are elected to this House to weigh carefully the arguments on difficult issues and come up with objective and reasoned legislation. Many Conservative Members have spoken against the Government's proposals in the Bill. I want to deal with those proposals carefully, consider where they fall short and support them when they are correct.

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton–Brown]

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) mentioned that his constituency postbag on this issue was five to one in favour of gun-using folk. My postbag is running at about 10 to one in favour of the gun-using folk. They have been to see me in my surgery, and I have had many letters from them. They are ordinary people—thoroughly decent, law-abiding people—and I think that their case should be heard this evening.

I am pleased that the Government set up the Cullen committee so that it could examine the issue objectively. I have read Lord Cullen's report. It is well reasoned, well written and well argued, and he has examined a range of witnesses very carefully. I shall return to the report later. First, however, let me warmly welcome the concession that the Government made this evening in withdrawing the money resolution and having a rethink.

The original money resolution allowed expenditure of between £25 million and £50 million. Approximately 160,000 guns are to be taken out of circulation. If the average price of a gun is £300—the amount that I calculated when I was writing my speech—that means £48 million to start with. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside says that the average price is £500, which would mean a total bill of £80 million. That does not include the accessories involved in shooting sports. I think it wholly reasonable for people to be properly compensated for all the accessories that they have had to purchase in order to obtain shotgun and firearms certificates.

Perhaps I should declare an interest at this point. I hold a firearms certificate and a shotgun certificate, I own firearms and shotguns and I have shot all my life, so I can claim to know a little about the issue.

In order to obtain a firearms certificate, people have been obliged to have expensive steel cabinets installed to satisfy police requirements for safe keeping of the weapons. I think it entirely reasonable for compensation to be provided in that regard, and I think that my right hon. and learned Friend acknowledged the need for such compensation this evening. Much more difficult issues are at stake, however, and the Home Office will have to deal with them. For example, there must be some compensation for gun clubs. If a group of law-abiding people have got together and installed their own gun safe or, indeed, armoury and the gun club is now to be closed because there is no raison d'être for its membership, it is surely incumbent on the Government to compensate the club to some extent.

I return to Lord Cullen's proposals and what the Government intend to do about them. I hope that, even at this late stage, the Government will examine the proposals very carefully. My right hon. and learned Friend made great play of a letter—which has appeared in the Library—from the Forensic Science Service signed by a Mr. Warlow.

As other hon. Members have said, the letter runs to one and a quarter pages; half of it relates to shotguns, which are irrelevant to the issue that we are discussing. We are going to deprive 57,000 people of their guns on the basis of a flimsy letter like that. I have to say that it is incumbent on the Government whom I support to come up with better reasons for taking large-bore handguns away from those people.

I submit that it would be perfectly possible to oblige the gun trade to design guns in a way that permits them to be easily dismantled and reassembled. As Lord Cullen stated, different parts could be kept in the gun club and elsewhere, which would make it much more difficult to steal them. I do not think that it is good enough simply to say that, because most guns today are designed in a way that makes it difficult to take them apart, we should ban large-bore pistols. I do not think that that argument holds water.

Although I support the Government's proposals, I ask them, even at this late stage, to consider allowing some larger-bore pistols to be kept centrally in gun clubs, under proper control—in armouries, perhaps—fitted with burglar alarms and constantly inspected by the police, who would also constantly inspect the official registers. The range of controls could be enormous, and it would be virtually impossible for the guns to be stolen.

We must put the issue into context. In Britain, barring the horrific incidents at Dunblane and Hungerford, in a normal year there are approximately 40 deaths by firearms. That is 40 too many, but there are 20,000 in the United States of America. I have listened with dismay to the ignorant comments of Opposition Members. If they tighten gun law and ban all guns, they will still get a Dunblane. They will not be able to legislate madmen such as Thomas Hamilton or Michael Ryan out of existence. If Opposition Members give me enough money, I can go to the black market and purchase any semi-automatic or automatic rifle that they care to name. The more they legislate against guns, the more they drive them underground. We must, therefore, be logical and calm on the issue.

There are some sensible proposals in the Bill. I intervened on my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary on the issue of the granting of shotgun licences. My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) made crystal clear the police's mistakes in granting licences. I support the Government 100 per cent. in their wanting to tighten the granting of licences, but I urge them, as I said in my intervention, to make it less arbitrary.

Let us have a national register of guns and of gun users so that every police force can quickly check who is applying for guns and whether they have any criminal record or any suspected medical history that might lead another force to refuse or to revoke a licence. That seems eminently sensible. Let the gun-using lobby pay for such a register. I know that gun applications would cost more as a result, but it is reasonable that the gun-using lobby should be responsible in this respect.

I warmly welcome other proposals in the Bill. It is right that, when applying for a gun licence, people should have to have two referees. It has been suggested that a medical practitioner should be one of them. I wholeheartedly support that, but it would be unreasonable to expect the medical profession to detect every psychopath at every stage. Anyone who knows anything about the subject knows that psychopaths can arise quickly, but applications need to be vetted closely in the first instance so that such people, if they have any history, are rooted out and not granted an application.

I hope that my hon. Friends will be able to clarify other provisions in the Bill on Report. One concerns the necessity for all firearm holders to be a gun club member.

The relevant clause makes it clear that people who are granted firearms certificates for vermin destruction will not have to be gun club members—at least I hope that my interpretation is correct—but most police will grant firearms certificates on the basis that they are for vermin destruction and for target shooting, thereby obliging all firearms certificate holders to become a member of a registered gun club.

Such people will not only have to become a member of a club, but attend that gun club regularly. That is too onerous a hurdle for people who genuinely use firearms for vermin and deer destruction. I hope that my hon. Friends will be able to clarify that matter.

Much has been said tonight about the issue. I hope that we will consider it in Committee in a cool, calm manner. I warmly support the major thrust of the Government's proposals.

9.13 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): May I congratulate the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on his well-measured, compassionate and sensible speech? I commend it to the House.

On a point of order, the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) referred to motion No. 2 on today's Order Paper, which he described as effectively a guillotine motion. I had responsibility for whipping proceedings on the 1988 Firearms (Amendment) Bill, which was introduced after the Hungerford incident. It too was guillotined in its final stages—after the Government had introduced a whole raft of 60-plus clauses, despite having given a commitment to do no such thing. That was legislation in haste and we have since repented at leisure. There is a great danger that we will do the same with this Bill.

Much has been said tonight, and I will not repeat most of the points that have been made. I am the honorary pistol captain of the Palace of Westminster Rifle Club. I will return to that matter later if there is time.

In an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) earlier, I said that the certificates possessed by Thomas Hamilton were obtained on the basis of false information. My hon. Friend countered, quite correctly, by saying that there was no evidence of that in the Cullen report. A great deal of evidence that was not included in that report has since come to light. It is now an undisputed fact that Mr. Hamilton—as with Michael Ryan before him—obtained his firearms certificates on the basis of false information and that the police failed to exercise due diligence.

Hon. Members have said that even if the police had exercised diligence, that would not have stopped Thomas Hamilton. That is probably true, but no matter what legislation we pass, if the police are not there to enforce it or are unable to enforce it, it does not mean a thing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn said that there are 240,000 illegally held guns. Some people say that there are twice as many, others say there are 14 times as many and some agencies even say that there are 16 times as many. If the police cannot enforce the law on illegal firearms, what is the point of asking them to enforce it on legally held guns that the Bill will make illegal? It is unenforceable. As responsible politicians, we have a bounden duty ensure that whatever we consign to law must be enforceable. To do anything less would be dishonest.

I have not consulted only shooters on this matter; I have consulted the police. A fortnight last Friday, I spoke to a very senior policeman who had read in the press all the comments that I am supposed to have made. His reaction was, "Frank, you are saying the right things at the wrong time." I said that if he really thought that, he should be repeating those same statements.

If the Bill passes into law, when the next foul deed is done—and as surely as night follows day it will happen at some time—people will look not to Parliament but to the police for failing to enforce the legislation that they had been led to believe would resolve the problem, but cannot. The police officer was somewhat embarrassed by that observation.

I spoke to a second policeman only yesterday. He is even more senior—I suppose I could say that he is staff rank. I put the same arguments to him. His reaction was, "Frank, if I had my way I would do away with every bloody firearm in the country." He followed that by saying, "But given the circumstances that apply at the moment, I know you are right."

What are we about this evening? Are we thinking of passing some sop to convince the people on the streets that their protection is assured? If that is the game, once again we are being dishonest. I was every bit as distressed as anyone by what happened at Dunblane, just as I was distressed by what happened at Hungerford long ago. I would support the most stringent application of Lord Cullen's proposals, and go even further.

Instead of accepting illogical proposals to pay various amounts of compensation, which is bound to prove inadequate, will not work and is unnecessary if we opt for the dismantling of weapons, we should give the money to the police to improve their manning levels, equipment and means of dealing with the problem—as they should have dealt with it before Dunblane and before Hungerford. The money resolution has had to be withdrawn, which shows how much careful preparation has gone into it. What a farce.

On the five or six occasions over the past four or five years when my constituents have called me to complain that Cleveland constabulary was being too stringent with their applications, my reaction has always been: damn good show; that is how it should be done. Time and again, I have told shooters, "If you have any belief in the respectability of your sport, you should welcome that stringency," and they agreed with me.

I have already talked about our responsibility as hon. Members. Before we cast our votes today, we must remember that we cannot con the public. We must enact achievable, enforceable, reasonable and necessary legislation—but the Bill meets none of those criteria.

I am unfortunately unable to take part in the Bill's Committee stage on Monday because, as Rapporteur of the Defence and Security Committee of the North Atlantic Assembly, I must present my report on the partnership for peace at the plenary session in Paris, but I shall be hoping to God that hon. Members see sense before it is too late. There is a danger that we will enact legislation which, in future years, will be recognised for what it is: simply silly.

9.21 pm

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): I am not a gun owner or a licence holder, although I have shot one or two pistols. I am a legislator, and I come to the House as

[Mr. Tim Devlin]

a representative of the people of Stockton, South, who hold differing views on this issue. Some people want a complete ban on firearms; others own firearms and do not want them to be banned. My duty is to represent all those views.

Above all, however, my duty is to use my judgment. I have been in the House long enough to know that when it acts in haste, it repents at leisure, that undoing bad laws is considerably harder than passing them initially, and that when fashionable causes drive us to legislate it demonstrates the power not of the House but of the media.

I call to mind immediately the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988, which was passed after Hungerford and intended to ensure that no other such massacre occurred. I call to mind the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, which was supposed to stop dogs savaging children. I find that just as many dogs are savaging small children as ever before, and that the legislation that we passed was unenforceable, ineffective and useless.

Like the vast majority of my constituents, I share the grief of parents whose children were killed at Dunblane. Indeed, my wife was a personal friend of some of them. Nothing can bring back those children. It was a tragedy, the like of which has never been seen before in this country. I can well understand the subconscious feeling that those parents must have of being cheated out of their chance to get even with Thomas Hamilton as a result of his killing himself.

We should do all that we can to prevent a recurrence of such a tragedy. However, I cannot understand the revanchist quest to ban all pistols to "prevent" such a tragedy from ever happening again. What Hamilton did at Dunblane was and is illegal. There is already a law against it. I deplore the illusion being put forward that something like that can be prevented by law. As my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) said, we cannot legislate for the actions of a lunatic. Banning all guns will no more prevent the next massacre than the present law on murder has prevented previous ones.

Do any of us—right, left or centre—want to stand for election on this issue alone? Does anyone here really think that this issue should be the sole determinant of whether either party is fit to govern the country? Of course not. We all stand for office on the basis of the principles that we set out to the public at a general election. We are then trusted to decide these matters in accordance with those principles. One of the principles that I stood for at the general election was the public safety of my constituents. Another was the protection of individual liberties. Those two need to be balanced.

Looking back over my nine years' experience in the House, I think that three features make for good law. First, an Act should be an effective and enforceable measure to deal with the mischief in question. Secondly, it must be comprehensible. Thirdly, it must be fair.

If we examine the Bill with those criteria in mind, we find that, first, it will probably not be effective. Only 0.2 per cent. of legally held firearms currently figure in homicides. They do not figure at all in other major crimes. It is a fallacy to suggest that banning pistols will cut off the supply of illegal weapons.

Four years ago I went to Czechoslovakia. I went to a market place in a small town where the Czechoslovak army, as it then was, was selling off its weapons to anyone from the West who wanted to buy them. I could have put a weapon in my car boot. I then drove through Austria, Germany and France on my way back to the United Kingdom. Nobody looked in the car at the various borders that I crossed. Many criminals in this country know that that is possible.

The leading criminologist in the United States, Professor Don Kates, who teaches constitutional and criminal law at St. Louis university, considered the issue of restricting handguns. Coming from a liberal tradition, he concluded:

"Banning guns . . . defies criminological scholarship. Indeed, the consensus in criminology today is that no form of gun control has much value."

Mr. Colin Greenwood has produced the most extensive study on the subject in this country, entitled "Firearms Control: A Study of Armed Crimes and Firearms Control in England and Wales". He concluded:

"No matter how one approaches the figures, one is forced to the rather startling conclusion that the use of firearms in crime was very much less when there were no controls of any sort and when anyone, convicted criminal or lunatic, could buy any type of firearm without restriction. Half a century of strict controls on pistols has ended, perversely, with a far greater use of this class of weapon in crime than ever before."

As I pointed out to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), shotguns are more powerful than pistols. They are easily sawn off and are more often used in crime.

If criminals do not have access to weapons, they will find other means. Nikki Conroy was murdered with a knife and other children in the same class were threatened with knives in a constituency next to mine.

My second criterion is comprehensibility. Of course it is comprehensible to every member of the public that we ban all handguns.

The third criterion is fairness. Is it fair that 2,000 members of the Muzzle Loaders Association of Great Britain should be banned from having matchlocks, flintlocks and percussion cap pistols? The Opposition propose the banning of all handguns. When was the last time someone was held up with a flintlock pistol? Perhaps it was by Dick Turpin.

We should consider the proposal to offer compensation for legitimately bought weapons. Is it feasible for us to hand out enormous sums of money—far more than the Government are prepared to admit—when hard-pressed public services and many more worthy causes, including hospitals, schools and prisons are seeking increased resources in the forthcoming Budget? Is it right that we should implement the legislation in two months when it took us 13 months to pass the last firearms measure, which was supposed to have solved the problem altogether?

Hon. Members may know that I am vice-chairman of the Anglo-Japanese group, so I found out what has happened in Japan where private ownership of handguns is prohibited. The relevant statute is the Firearms and Swords Control Law which provides punishment of up to 10 years forced labour for violation. The results are as one would expect: a thriving black market, an enormous criminal and illicit armoury outside any control which by all accounts is steadily growing through criminal imports. In 1952, the police in Japan seized 17 pistols from gang members. In 1972, they seized 778 pistols, and two years later 1,054. In the past four years they have seized an average of more than 1,200 weapons per year.

We should ask ourselves what we are trying to do. The Bill will affect only weapons currently held on legitimate firearms certificates. What have legitimate firearms certificate holders done to deserve that? All hon. Members know that the Bill is an overreaction and that it will not solve the problem. We all know that we are bowing to media pressure and that it will not work. Why do we not support the Cullen report's recommendations? It was a careful report and we should amend the Bill to bring it back into line with the original report.

I shall support the Bill on Second Reading because I believe that we should control guns. However, we should amend the Bill quite radically—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

9.31 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): We have had a sober and well informed debate on a serious issue. For the most part, it has been conducted with detail and knowledge and, of course, strong feelings. However, there have been some exceptions. The hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) made yet another disgraceful speech, which plumbed depths even for him. I found the remarks of the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton–Brown) difficult to take in the atmosphere of consideration that has permeated the debate.

The issue is so serious and feelings run so deep that I am not the only one to wonder why, when heavy issues of conscience such as abortion, Sunday trading and now the question of caning in English schools were deemed appropriate for a free vote, an issue on which Parliament and its Members will be judged in years to come is subject to a Conservative Whip so that Conservative Members will be dragooned through the Lobby to produce a decision which, as a consequence of that, cannot be sustained.

Making a law which, from its very birth process, cannot be stable, effective or long lasting, does no justice to the strength of feeling on all sides of the argument and on both sides of the House. Even at this 11th hour, I call on the Government to drop the Whip before Monday's votes and let Parliament decide so that the law that we make will endure.

If the hon. Member for Weston–super–Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) chooses to press his amendment to a vote, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), right hon. and hon. Members on the Government Front Bench and I will vote against it. I shall advise my right hon. and hon. Friends to do the same. We are not happy with the Bill in certain key areas, but it is better than the law at it stands at present.

I live in Dunblane, but I do not approach this debate with any irrational knee-jerk reaction to one particularly awful atrocity. Like so many others, alongside the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister for Education, Housing and Fisheries, I have been deeply and permanently moved and changed by what I saw and heard in Dunblane on 13 March, but I still look on this key issue as being one of ensuring public safety and not some punitive raid on a legal hobby carried out by thousands of ordinary and largely law-abiding people. I react with passion and quite natural emotion to what happened that day at the hand of a crazed, legally armed and suicidal killer, but I address the issues of firearms control coolly, rationally and dispassionately. I find offensive the idea that those who argue alongside the Police Federation of England and Wales for a complete outlawing of handguns are to be defined as merely hysterical, emotional or somehow lacking in reason or justice.

I once shot a rifle as a recreation—it is perhaps one of the few sports that I did passably well—but I will never do it again. I do not, therefore, speak with ignorance on the subject or with insensitivity about a sport that will be affected by the law that we shall pass, but I believe that the right to life is greater and more important than the right of any person to conduct themselves in any sport.

The policy is not one of vengeance. Nor is it an instant reaction to be worried about such a vast and previously unseen arsenal of handguns. Having waited nine long months for this debate, this policy is not one of indecent haste. It is not a policy of blame or emotion to say that one category of firearms more than any other poses a very different and distinct threat to public safety and that we should do something radical to prevent what has now happened twice in a single decade in our country, when legally held, legally obtained firearms were turned against ordinary citizens.

Sir Jim Spicer (West Dorset): I know the hon. Gentleman well and I look on him, if I may say so, as a friend. He said that he has fired a rifle. I represented the United Kingdom in the modern pentathlon championships and had to fire a pistol. What he is saying is that never again will anyone represent the United Kingdom in the modern pentathlon, never again will any paraplegic who does not run the marathon or play basketball but who enjoys shooting a pistol be allowed to do so, and that such activity will be outlawed totally for all time. He is saying that we shall never again be represented at the Olympics or any other sport worldwide. Does he accept that?

Mr. Robertson: I respect the hon. Gentleman and I reciprocate his sentiments. It is with some feeling, therefore, that I say that when he makes a passionate plea for something that we might never do again, let him remember the innocents who died on 13 March and what they will never do again. We have to strike a balance—it is an onerous burden for us to do so—between those who might not take part in a sport as it is currently defined and those who have lost everything and are now campaigning to ensure that no other families have to go through the same tragedy. I do not find it difficult to make that judgment, most hon. Members do not find it difficult to make that judgment, and outside the House there is no doubt where the judgment lies.

It is not a policy of blame or emotion to say simply that we should identify handguns. It is no knee-jerk reaction to do now what we should have done after 1988 and to minimise the risk of another Hungerford or of a repetition of what happened on 13 March at Dunblane primary school.

Mr. Devlin: I ask for the hon. Member's assurance that if we pass the legislation in the form that he would like, that sort of massacre will never happen again.

Mr. Robertson: I suspected from the quality of the hon. Member's contribution that he would be unable to rise to the seriousness of the debate, and his intervention

[Mr. Robertson]

proves it. Had he been listening, he would know that I have just mentioned the minimising of risks. The Government made a decision about minimising the risks. There are 200,000 handguns in circulation and the Home Secretary, who does not consider himself a liberal dove on that or any other issue, has decided to minimise the risks by reducing that number by 80 per cent. My hon. Friends and I want to go 20 per cent. further than that in minimising the risks that we believe should be contained and which now exist.

The definition of a gun, in the original firearms legislation which replaced the zero regulation in the 1920s, is clear and unmistakable. A gun is a

"lethal barrelled weapon of any description from which any shot, bullet or missile can be discharged".

"Lethal" is the word. Such guns are designed to kill. That is their purpose and function, and pistols stand out in a special category. No other instrument of death, no other firearm licensed today, would have enabled one man to carry 743 bullets, to fire 106 shots, to cause 58 wounds, to kill 16 children and their teacher, to injure 15 people and to commit suicide himself—all within four minutes. Pistols are small, hidable and portable. They are also horribly lethal and we have to deal with that.

A number of the points that were made in the debate should be addressed. One point in particular must be addressed seriously—the claim by hon. Members that their postbags should tell them what to do. The October 1996 edition of the magazine, *Target Gun*, said:

"It is time for us to start writing again to our MPs, a brief letter, not detailed, just stressing our participation in an honourable sport that we wish to continue to enjoy. This is particularly important if your MP is Labour, but Conservatives too need to feel the weight of the pro-gun post bag."

We are feeling that.

I was handed a book at my surgery a week last Saturday by the secretary of the Clyde Valley pistol club, Mr. McGhie, who is a constituent of mine. It is 400 glossy pages long and was produced by the pro-gun lobby. It analyses all the evidence and the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) chose to quote from it during the debate. It has no price on it. It is being handed out free throughout the country. That takes a lot of money. Against that, the Dunblane Snowdrop petition's total resources at the moment are, I believe, £3,000. A gun lobby with a war chest of £250,000 is set against a sentiment and a petition signed by 750,000 people and hardly any money. Nobody should come to the House and claim that we should make a decision based on the postbags that we receive on the issue.

Mr. John Carlisle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: No. I have limited time and some of it has already been taken. Hon. Members have said that it is the individual and not the gun that causes the problem and that we should address the individual, not the gun.

Lord Cullen, in paragraph 1.11, was clear about that:

"There is no certain means of ruling out the onset of a mental illness of a type which gives rise to danger; or of identifying those whose personalities harbour dangerous propensities. On this ground alone it is insufficient protection for the public merely to tackle the individual rather than the gun."

That is why we must address the issue, and why the Government have chosen to do so.

Some, such as the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), say that everything was the fault of the Central Scotland police. The police, they say, did not implement the law, so we should pile the blame on one of the smallest police forces in the country. Then, apparently, we would have the solution to everything that happened.

Lord Cullen examined that idea in enormous detail. A deputy chief constable, one of Her Majesty's inspectors of constabulary, admitted an error and has resigned. That could be an example to many people on the other side of the argument. But I remind hon. Members what Lord Cullen said about the licence:

"On balance I consider that there was a case for revocation of Thomas Hamilton's firearm certificate and that it should have been acted upon. However, I do not consider that this would have been the end of the matter."

Using the usual double negative for which the legal profession has such a great affection, he continued:

"It is not certain that an appeal would have been unsuccessful."

That is Lord Cullen's considered view.

I knew the murderer, Hamilton. I was uneasy and angry about him, and my wife and I campaigned against him for years. But I recognise that the evidence against him is easier to see after the event, now that his supporters—he had many—have all disappeared like snow from a dyke. It is not sufficient, and never will be sufficient, to put the blame on an individual police force.

Now the Government have offered their solution, which has been berated both by Opposition and by Conservative Members. The Home Secretary has left a major loophole by saying that the Government will exempt .22 weapons. Those are said to be somehow less lethal than the instruments of death that are to be banned. However, in the letter sent to hon. Members, the British Shooting Sports Council wrote:

"While the rate of fire of a single-shot gun is somewhat less than a multi-shot handgun, the difference (perhaps 12 per minute instead of 20 per minute) is not significant in the context of events like Dunblane."

I draw to the attention of the House a brochure for target guns—.22 pistols. I have it in my hand now, and hon. Members can see the face of the guns that will remain in circulation, and which may indeed become more numerous because compensation money may be diverted from the larger guns to those that will remain legal.

The decision on the issue will be ours. It will be for us, as Members of the House, to judge the balance between a sport and the risk to people from the thousands of guns now in legal circulation. This is a defining moment for all of us. Heavy is the responsibility of having a vote tonight, and perhaps more serious votes on Monday. If we choose wrongly and allow more than 40,000 lethal pistols to remain in circulation, it may be we who vote, but we are hardly likely to be the ones who pay the price.

9.48 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): The debate and the Bill have their roots in the tragedy of Dunblane. The tone of the debate and the nature of most of the contributions have made it a constructive discussion. I can guarantee that, although the Government will not be able to accept all the suggestions made tonight, every contribution will be carefully studied and assessed, to guide our thinking during the passage of the Bill.

In a debate to which many distinguished contributions have been made, hon. Members on both sides of the House were moved and impressed by the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire). It was a very thoughtful and moving speech, which endeavoured to address an extremely difficult subject with good sense and mildness in the face of the emotion generated.

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) talked about the collision of two rights—the right of people to enjoy a legitimate sport and the right of the public to be protected. We believe that we have produced a solution that achieves both those aims. We believe that the public are protected by our proposals as far as they can be. Of course, no matter what measures we take, neither I, nor my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, nor anyone else can absolutely guarantee that there will never be a repetition of the dreadful tragedies in Dunblane and, before that, in Hungerford. We have to try to find the solution that best protects the public and if, in the course of that solution, it is also possible to protect—at least to some extent—a legitimate sport that has been practised in this country to Olympic standard for 100 years, it is right that we should take that solution.

Mr. John Carlisle: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Miss Widdecombe: I shall; but I would point out, not in an aggressive way, that, because Opposition Members' speeches have eaten into the time available for my winding-up speech—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."]—this will be the only intervention I accept.

Mr. Carlisle: My hon. Friend mentioned Olympic sports, but she should also address Commonwealth sports. Our right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said that he would look at amendments that might allow certain weapons to be brought into this country for the Manchester Commonwealth games in 2002. On that basis, will she acknowledge that, even though those weapons might come in from abroad, they will not be available for the British team to practise with? As a result, we shall be at a severe disadvantage—indeed, we shall be unable to take part even if the exemption is given. Will my hon. Friend address that problem and advise the Commonwealth games associations on what they should do in respect of Manchester?

Miss Widdecombe: I would point out to my hon. Friend that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary did not say that we would consider amendments to achieve the event at Manchester. In fact, no amendment would be necessary—the authority could simply be given. It is true and it must be faced that, under our proposals, it will no longer be possible for British competitors to take part in some Commonwealth games events.

I want to make progress on answering some of the points that were raised in the debate. A point that was raised consistently, not only by Conservative Members but by several Opposition Members—specifically, the hon. Members for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) and for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook)—was whether we should accept the Cullen preference for dismantling rather than banning. We have come to the view that there have been no convincing arguments to overcome the objections that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary explained in his speech and that were based on advice from the Forensic Science Service and on the document that has now been placed in the Library.

My right hon. and learned Friend pointed out that existing barrel blocks are currently commercially available only for certain types of shotgun and that they are not suitable for handguns. Even if such blocks became more widely available, it would be quite impossible to guarantee that someone with enough determination could not remove them.

As for removing parts from handguns so as to disable them, my right hon. and learned Friend acknowledged that it is true to say that the slide or cylinder can be removed from many handguns and, indeed, that it is quite easy to do so. However, that is not universally the case and, more important, it would again be impossible to ensure that people did not keep illicit spares at home.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss Widdecombe: I regret that I shall not. Many questions were asked in the debate, which I want to answer. I shall be happy to engage in further discussion with the hon. Gentleman, as I shall be happy to engage in discussion on any of the questions raised by my hon. Friends and by Opposition Members, but my time is somewhat truncated.

The hon. Member for Blackburn asked whether I would consider making any changes in the age limits. The hon. Gentleman was not inaccurate, but he gave a brief description of the present system and, in the limited time available, it is important to put on record that a great many caveats are already built into provisions dealing with young people's access to the types of gun that he mentioned. For instance, a person under the age of 17—the hon. Gentleman concentrated on 14-year-olds and was not inaccurate—may not purchase or hire any firearm or ammunition, and that includes shotguns, air weapons and their related ammunition. It is an offence to sell or hire a firearm or ammunition to an under-17-year-old and, again, that includes shotguns, air weapons and ammunition. A person under the age of 15 may not have an assembled shotgun with him, unless he is under adult supervision, and it is an offence to give a shotgun or ammunition to someone under 15, and so forth—I shall not go into further detail, but I thought it necessary to put that on record.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Sir C. Onslow) asked about the arrangements that we would make for museums and whether they were affected by the proposals. No changes are proposed to the existing arrangements for granting museum licences to those institutions covered by the existing legislation—those

[Miss Widdecombe]

funded wholly or partly from public funds. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has said that we will produce an amendment to the definition to include other museums or similar institutions that are not publicly funded, such as regimental museums. I hope that that offers some reassurance to hon. Friends who raised the matter.

I was also asked about compensation for collections. Although compensation will be based on the value of the individual pieces in a collection, it stands to reason that, merely by being a part of a collection, a piece may have an enhanced value or a value that is affected by that fact, and that will certainly be taken into account. Again, I hope that that provides some of the necessary reassurance.

Much of the debate, particularly on the Government side, concentrated on compensation. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary made the situation extremely clear. We have made it clear that we will table an amended money resolution and that we will take into account the points raised in the debate when we consider our response to them and how that should be reflected in that resolution.

The hon. Member for Blackburn and others repeatedly pointed out that .22s can also be used to kill. That is self-evidently true, but in 95 per cent. of homicides involving the use of firearms recorded between 1992 and 1994, the weapons were not in that category. Indeed, the American experience clearly shows that fewer than one in eight of the weapons used in crime—not just for homicides—are .22s.

The effect of the Bill will be to give us some of the toughest gun laws in the world. That will provide the public with the protection that they deserve and that we are duty bound to give them.

I believe that this measure gives the public much reassurance, and that it is a wise and sensible Bill. At the same time, we have been concerned to preserve the legitimate activities of a century-old sport. I commend the Bill to the House. Possibly the reason why Opposition Members have been given a free vote is the number of dissenting voices that we have heard among their ranks.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 35, Noes 384.

Division No. 12] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Churchill, Mr
Colvin, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Gilbert, Dr John
Gill, Christopher
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hunter, Andrew
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jopling, Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Tom
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Mills, Iain
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Richards, Rod
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Taylor, John D *(Strangf'd)*
Viggers, Peter
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony Marlow and
Mr. Rupert Allason.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Arbuthnot, James
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin-Walker, John
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Barnes, Harry
Batiste, Spencer
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, A J
Bendall, Vivian
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boateng, Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burden, Richard
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clelland, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coe, Sebastian
Cohen, Harry
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Ms R *(Perth Kinross)*
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Dykes, Hugh
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Etherington, Bill
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'ld)*
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fatchett, Derek
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Fraser, John
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Galloway, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goodlad, Alastair

Goodson–Wickes, Dr Charles
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hague, William
Hall, Mike
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat–Amory, David
Henderson, Doug
Hendry, Charles
Heppell, John
Heseltine, Michael
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hurd, Douglas
Ingram, Adam
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Janner, Greville
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Key, Robert
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Legg, Barry
Lennox–Boyd, Sir Mark
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Lidington, David
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretf'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lord, Michael
Loyden, Eddie
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
MacKay, Andrew
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McMaster, Gordon
McNair–Wilson, Sir Patrick
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Madel, Sir David
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merchant, Piers
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Oiner, Bill
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Portillo, Michael
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Redwood, John
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Riffkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Rowe, Andrew
Rowlands, Ted
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Robert
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Short, Ms Clare
Simpson, Alan
Sims, Sir Roger
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Spearing, Nigel
Speed, Sir Keith
Spellar, John
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trickett, Jon
Trotter, Neville
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watson, Mike
Watts, John
Welsh, Andrew
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wolfson, Mark
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Roger Knapman and
Mr. Gyles Brandreth.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading), and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills),

That Clauses Nos. 1 to 5 and any new Clauses and Schedules appearing on the Order Paper not later than Friday 15th November which relate to the prohibition of small firearms or to further special exemptions from the general prohibition of small firearms be committed to a Committee of the whole House.

That the remainder of the Bill be committed to a Standing Committee.

That when the provisions of the Bill considered, respectively, by the Committee of the whole House and by the Standing Committee have been reported to the House, the Bill be proceeded with as if the Bill had been reported as a whole to the House from the Standing Committee.—*[Miss Widdecombe.]*

Question agreed to.

Committee tomorrow.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, at any sitting day on which the House resolves itself into a Committee on Clauses Nos. 1 to 5 of the Firearms (Amendment) Bill and any new Clauses or Schedules committed to a Committee of the whole House.

(1) the Chairman shall, not later than Ten o'clock, put successively—

(a) the Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or Schedule which has been read a second time, the Question on any Amendment to such a new Clause or Schedule which has been selected by him and which may then be moved and, thereafter, the Question that the Clause or Schedule, or the Clause or Schedule as amended, be added to the Bill); and

(c) any other Question necessary for the disposal of those provisions of the Bill committed to the Committee, which shall include the Question on any Amendment or new Clause or Schedule or Amendment thereto which has been selected by him and which may then be moved; and

(2) proceedings in the said Committee may be taken, though opposed, after Ten o'clock.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

ECCLESIASTICAL LAW

That the draft Grants to the Churches Conservation Trust Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 15th October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

Question agreed to.

WELSH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL

Ordered,

That—

(1) in respect of the Welsh Development Agency Bill, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time; and

(2) if the Welsh Development Agency Bill is committed to a Committee of the whole House, further proceedings on the Bill shall stand postponed; and that as soon as the proceedings on any Resolution come to by the House on Welsh Development Agency Bill [*Money*] have been concluded, this House will immediately resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

PETITION

Firearms

10.16 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): This petition was signed by more than 200 handgun owners and target shooters on the Isle of Wight last weekend. They feel aggrieved that they are being penalised because of a dreadful and heinous crime committed by an evil man.

The petition reads:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of the rifle, pistol and shot gun shooters of the Isle of Wight assembled at the meeting at Brickfield's Horse Centre, Isle of Wight on Saturday November 9th 1996.

Sheweth that insufficient consideration is being given to the lawful interests of all rifle, pistol and shotgun shooters, resulting in a grave injustice.

Wherefore, your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House base any amendments to the Firearms Acts on the recommendations of the report submitted to the House by the Lord Cullen and in particular, paragraph 9.112.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray &c.

The petition is signed by B. R. Hall, 34 Vinings road, Sandown, Isle of Wight.

To lie upon the Table.

Holocaust Victims (Compensation)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

10.19 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Recent events have reminded the world of the depravity of Hitler's Germany and the evil that was the holocaust. But the litany of shame engulfs civilised countries such as Switzerland and Austria, as well as Germany.

The holocaust was unparalleled in its ferocity, and mere headline numbers of those who were killed do not show the extent of the depravity. Homes were looted, property was transferred to the Germans' lackeys, paintings and valuables were confiscated, wedding rings were melted down and the gold teeth of holocaust victims were removed from dead bodies and transformed into gold for the Germans to use. It has been estimated that by the end of the war the Germans had looted £550 million.

No depravity was too wicked for Hitler. The record of some so-called neutral countries was less than distinguished. The Swiss used confidentiality laws to squirrel away many millions of pounds. During the pre-war period, there was apocryphal evidence of future victims depositing money in Swiss banks. After the war, when the dependants of those victims claimed their inheritance, they were denied access to those accounts.

Secrecy was used to camouflage the selfish exploitation of the dead by the Swiss. Only now is the matter being thoroughly investigated. It is a scandal of the highest proportions. Many people who could have benefited have died, and those who stand to benefit are in the evening of their lives. Given that, are the Swiss moving with speed to investigate those accounts? No. They said that it would take two or three years, during which time many of the potential beneficiaries will pass on.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): Is not the nub of the matter that innocent men and women placed their trust in the Swiss banking system, and that system totally failed them? If the Swiss have any sense of honour and decency, they will disgorge those assets without being pressed or nagged, and do what is right and just for the people who died in the holocaust.

Mr. Marshall: My hon. Friend is right. It is scandalous that more than 50 years after the end of the war, the Swiss have still not disgorged those ill-gotten gains. Many of the individuals concerned have lived traumatic lives, and they may be financially pressed. The least that the Swiss can do is to honour that debt from the past. It is a scandal that the Swiss Government and Swiss bankers have put greed before conscience, and money before principle. Their sleight of hand since the war is nothing compared with their activities during the war.

During the war, Swiss banks were happy to accept deposits from the German authorities. Part of the proceeds were used to find havens for war criminals towards the end of the war. Where did the money come from? As early as 10 August 1942, Professor Urner warned the Swiss national bank that the money coming from Germany was looted money: it did not belong to the German people; it was stolen money. In 1943, the allies warned the Swiss that they were receiving looted gold—partly from melted-down teeth and wedding rings—and not money that belonged to the German pre-war gold reserves.

The Swiss have a shameful record. They had no conscience about receiving stolen money or selling stolen goods. They closed their eyes in war; their consciences should be opened in peacetime.

The gold that was given to the Tripartite Gold Commission in 1946 included much stolen gold. Will the Minister give me an assurance that before the residue of that gold is distributed, the Government will insist that its origins are checked closely? The gold in that pool that was taken from individuals should not be returned to the Government, but should be given to those who are still working for the refugees from the last war. Receiving stolen gold is an offence; receiving this stolen gold is a particularly offensive crime.

Mr. Sumberg: It is a sin.

Mr. Marshall: It is indeed.

The lethargy that has characterised Austrian and Swiss dealings with the matter since the war is unacceptable in this country. As I said, a delay of two to three years is involved, and the immediate descendants of those who placed the money in Swiss banks before the last war may not be alive in two or three years' time. Is that what the Swiss want? Historically, Switzerland has been regarded as a principled democracy, but this record of procrastination and delay threatens Switzerland's position in the world, and it risks becoming an international pariah. I ask the Swiss Government to order the Swiss banking system to expedite the inquiry as a matter of urgency.

Austria, however, joins Switzerland in this litany of shame—

Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones (Watford): I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me some of his time. I ought to tell the House—my hon. Friend may be unaware of this—that I work for a Swiss bank. I declare that interest before making my observations.

Will my hon. Friend urge the Minister to tell the House exactly what the Government's view is of their dealings with the Swiss—whether they have been co-operative—and what is the Government's view of the demands now being made of the Swiss commercial banks, as opposed to the national bank, to pay further moneys in addition to those that were paid in 1946?

Mr. Marshall: I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to do that. There is no doubt in my mind that the money paid over by the Swiss in 1946 was inadequate: it was regarded as the best that could be got in an effort to sort out a mess. There is also no doubt that Switzerland did very well out of the war, rather like the Conservative Members of Parliament who, in 1918, looked as if they had done "rather well out of the war". There is no doubt that Swiss banks, including the one employing my right hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), did rather well out of the war. They should hang their heads in shame. Not only did they get the gold; the Swiss unquestionably sold many looted paintings and other valuables that had been taken from people in the occupied parts of Europe. Switzerland has a record of which it can

[Mr. Marshall]

justly be ashamed—and my right hon. Friend is working for an organisation that should probably be ashamed of what it did as well.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Certainly not.

Mr. Marshall: My right hon. Friend may not be ashamed of it, but most people would be.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Marshall: No. I have given way once, and my right hon. Friend declared his interest. I will not give way again.

Another country with a record of shame is Austria. In 1955, Austria was given a pile of paintings and other works of art and instructed to return them, or to try to find the rightful owners. Only in the past few days have the Austrians held an auction of those paintings. They squirrelled them away in the Mauerbach monastery from 1955 until 1996. Only when the catalogue of that auction was published did a lady in Israel see it and say, "Those are two paintings that were in our home in Vienna before the war."

For years and years, that lady assumed that the paintings had disappeared. For years and years, she would have loved to have them in her own house. Instead, they were in a monastery in Austria where she had no access to them. No wonder the Austrian Chancellor has apologised—but the Austrians should do more than apologise: they ought to be willing to make reparations to those who would otherwise have benefited.

Let me now talk about Germany. I recently met constituents who were slave labourers during the last war. The only hope that people had of surviving the death camps was to work in the factories of Nazi Germany. They were exploited; they received no pay and little food. The prisoners knew that, if they ever faltered in their work, they were liable to be killed the next day. They knew that if their health gave way, their lives would give way as well. They were literally working to survive. All those prisoners had suffered a loss of close relatives.

The other day, I met a constituent who was a slave labourer for just over two years. During that time, he was in five camps and had to march from Auschwitz to Austria. No one needed a map to see the way ahead because it was littered with bodies. Every time someone faltered on that march, German soldiers killed that person.

That was the reality of being a slave labourer in Germany from 1939 to 1945, but there was one thing that slave labourers did not receive. No one paid any insurance for them, so everyone who worked in Germany from 1939 to 1945 is entitled to a pension, except people who worked as slave labourers. That is iniquitous in the extreme and I call on the German Government to right that wrong. All they need to do is to impute insurance contributions for the time that people worked as slave labourers so that they may receive a pension. One of the people who got in touch with me had worked in a camp for 56 months as a slave labourer. Surely, any decent person would say that that lady was entitled to a pension, as well as substantial compensation for what she had to go through.

Victims of the holocaust include not only people who lived in the camps and survived, but all the children who came to England in 1938 and in 1939 through the Kinder transport system, who said goodbye to their parents in Berlin, never to see them again, and who were the only members of their family to come to Britain and to survive.

I am told by one of my friends, who is an expert on the matter, that those people are entitled to a pension, provided that they had a child before 30 November 1949. This constituent of mine secured a pension for someone who had a baby on 30 November 1949. If that child had been born on 1 December 1949, no pension would have been paid. That is bureaucratic madness and unkindness to an extreme Germanic extent.

I call on the German Government to fulfil their debt of honour to all the people who suffered under the Hitler regime, so that slave labourers and people who had to come to Britain to secure their future life and freedom are compensated by Germany. No money or financial payment can be enough to compensate them, but at least the German people should compensate them as much as they can.

10.32 pm

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): I thank the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), who is my local Member of Parliament, my pair and my friend, for many personal kindnesses in rough times and for securing the debate.

On Monday, I will travel to Switzerland with the right hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt) at the invitation of the Swiss Foreign Minister to discuss with him and others many of the matters that have been raised by the hon. Member for Hendon, South. I shall take a copy of his speech because it is important that the Swiss Government and people should understand the depth of feeling among hon. Members on both sides of the House.

I ask the Minister to do only these things. First, will he express the Government's feelings about the 1946 agreement? The Swiss sent 40,000 mainly Jewish people back from the Swiss border to their death, but accepted readily enough the gold from their teeth, which was melted into bars and sent to Switzerland by Germany. Under the agreement, the Swiss kept some $220 million of gold, providing only $60 million to the Tripartite Gold Commission. They should now make amends and renegotiate the agreement. I hope that that is the Government's view and that they will say so.

Secondly, I hope that the Government will express the view that, while awaiting the results of the commissions that they have rightly set up, the Swiss—as a Government and a people—should make a substantial gesture to help the Jewish and non-Jewish victims of Nazism.

Thirdly, the Tripartite Gold Commission—the United Kingdom, the United States and France—has almost finished its work. It is about to distribute the last tranche to Albania. It will then have a residue. Some 5.5 tonnes of gold will remain in the Bank of England. I ask the Government to say that they will not agree to the distribution of that residue unless and until the origins of that gold have been researched and investigated. It is stolen gold, robbed from individuals; robbed from the bodies of the dead. I am sure that the Government will agree with hon. Members on both sides of the House that in so far as it is individuals' gold, that proportion should

be returned—if not to the individuals who lost it, at least to their families and successors, who are still living in need and poverty as a result of the Nazi looting and the Nazi holocaust.

10.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Dr. Liam Fox): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) for raising this subject. If I am unable to reply to all the points raised in the debate, I shall write to hon. Members.

The series of events that my hon. Friend has called to our minds is one of the darkest episodes in the history of the European continent. The question of compensation for survivors of the holocaust is one that it is right for us to review regularly, although as the German Government stated in 1988:

"No matter how large the sum, no amount of money will ever suffice to compensate for National Socialist persecution. In this, the Federal Republic of Germany, its Western allies and responsible independent organisations have always concurred."

A provision of the treaty that effected the transition of the federal republic from occupied territory to sovereign state in 1952 required the new state to make restitution. Later the same year, following a conference on Jewish material claims against Germany, an agreement was signed in Luxembourg under which Germany agreed to pay DM3 billion to the state of Israel and DM450 million to various Jewish organisations that had been represented at the conference. The payment to the state of Israel was in recognition of the huge financial burden that that young nation had assumed in accepting so many victims of Nazi persecution in Europe.

Since then, the German authorities, at federal and state level, have continued to make available substantial sums to individual victims of Nazism. Such payments have been made both in single sums and in continuing pensions. The most recent figures issued by the German Government show that up to May 1996 they had disbursed DM97 billion for those purposes and that their continuing pension obligations were likely to bring that total up to DM124 billion. About 80 per cent. of the pension payments have been made to people outside Germany. In the case of the United Kingdom, under a bilateral agreement concluded in 1964, lump-sum payments were made to more than 1,000 people then living in the UK who had been held in concentration camps or comparable places. These averaged about £1,000 at 1965-66 prices—about £10,000 at today's prices.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South drew attention to the residue of the monetary gold pool held by the Tripartite Gold Commission in the UK and the USA and to the proposal by the World Jewish Restitution Organisation that this gold should be made available to compensate individual victims of Nazism, instead of being distributed to the Governments whose monetary gold was looted by the Nazis during the second world war. There are formidable legal and practical difficulties in the way of that proposal and with the permission of the House I would like briefly to outline the background.

Under the Paris agreement on reparations of 1946, the western allies agreed that gold and other valuables recovered from the Nazis should be allocated in two separate ways. Monetary gold—gold that had been looted or improperly removed from the gold reserves of occupied countries—was, as far as possible, to be returned to those countries. The Tripartite Gold Commission was set up for that purpose by the British, French and United States Governments. Non-monetary gold, together with a sum of $25 million in cash, was to be used to assist in the resettlement of persons displaced at the end of the war who could not be returned to their homes. That was done.

Countries that had had their reserves of monetary gold looted by the Nazis were invited to lodge claims with the Tripartite Gold Commission. Ten countries did so: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland and Yugoslavia. The commission then adjudicated the claims in bilateral negotiations with each claimant country, and with help from financial experts.

Monetary gold recovered by the allies after the war, with a cash contribution of 250 million Swiss francs from the Government of Switzerland, amounted to about 60 per cent. of the adjudicated and agreed claims. Most of the gold was distributed to claimant countries in the years immediately after the war, but in some cases distribution was delayed by counter-claims, two of which were taken to the International Court of Justice. Albania received its principal share of the gold pool only last month.

As has correctly been stated during the debate, a residue remains, which has been kept by the commission, because of the technical and practical difficulties of exactly dividing quantities of monetary gold. The legal position now is that the British, French and United States Governments, and the commission on their behalf, have a clear legal obligation to distribute the remaining gold to participant countries. Agreement would be required of the parties to the 1946 Paris agreement, and of the claimant countries themselves, if the residue were not to be distributed to claimant countries. There are also practical difficulties, one of which is that two of the recipient countries—Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia—have ceased to exist in their previous forms.

The Government are, however, extremely sympathetic to the idea of benefiting individual victims of Nazism in the final distribution of the gold pool, if a method can found of doing so that has a reasonable prospect of success. Therefore, we are consulting the French and US Governments about the matter. We are in close touch with the World Jewish Restitution Organisation and with the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) about how that might be achieved, and about how individual victims of Nazism who might benefit from such an arrangement could be identified.

The World Jewish Restitution Organisation has recognised that it would be appropriate for a mechanism to be set up to compensate non-Jewish victims of Nazism. We shall examine that possibility. I assure the House that any arrangement we reach will be fully in accordance with our legal and moral obligations.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) has raised the issue of whether the Swiss Government should contribute further to the funds available to the Tripartite Gold Commission. The position is that the Swiss Government—after negotiations with the war-time allies—agreed in Washington, in 1946, to make available 250 million Swiss francs to form the basis of the commission's monetary gold pool. That was in response to the allies' contention that the Swiss national

[Dr. Liam Fox]

bank must have known during the war that some of the monetary gold that it was buying from Germany had been looted from the monetary gold stocks of occupied countries. The allies expressly accepted that payment as a final settlement of any claims that they might have against Switzerland in relation to German gold.

Following expressions of concern in several countries about Switzerland's financial dealings with Nazi Germany, and the handling of deposits in Swiss banks that might have been made by holocaust victims, the Swiss Government announced, in September, a new and comprehensive expert inquiry into the entire course of Switzerland's financial exchanges with the Third Reich between 1933 and 1945. The law establishing the inquiry, which is currently passing through the Swiss Parliament with all-party support, will enable experts to override banking, legal and other professional secrecy rules. The Swiss Government have said that when the inquiry produces its report, which will be made public, they will give the findings appropriate consideration.

Mr. Janner: How long?

Dr. Fox: At the same time, another inquiry under the former US Treasury Secretary, Paul Volcker, is investigating the details of dormant bank accounts in Swiss banks, and the Swiss foreign ministry is looking into the question of post-war agreements with other countries on the bilateral settlement of claims. We are satisfied—following talks in September, in Berne, between the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the Swiss federal councillor, Flavio Cotti—that the Swiss Government are conducting all the investigations in good faith. To answer the question of the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West, I cannot provide a time scale, but we are determined to uncover as much of the truth about these dealings as can be revealed after the passage of half a century.

In those circumstances, I believe that it is right to await the results of those inquiries before considering what further action ought to be taken.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South has referred to suggestions that some non-monetary gold might have been wrongly included in the monetary gold pool administered by the Tripartite Gold Commission. I have already described the arrangements, made under the 1946 Paris agreement on reparations, under which monetary gold and non-monetary gold were to be treated separately and used for different purposes. In the light of the suggestions referred to by my hon. Friend, we are conducting a study of the available documents to try to establish as best we can after 50 years how thoroughly the task of dividing the gold was carried out.

From the documents we have so far found, it looks as though those concerned tried with great care and in good faith to allocate only monetary gold to the Tripartite Gold Commission's pool, working from descriptions submitted by the claimant countries of what had been in their gold reserves before occupation. It is relevant that the total amount of gold assembled in the monetary gold pool was enough to restore to the claimant countries only about 60 per cent. of what they had lost. We shall be looking into the matter further.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend the Minister consider giving restitution to organisations that help victims of the Holocaust, as well as to the victims themselves?

Dr. Fox: I have already mentioned that non-Jewish victims must be considered. I am certainly willing to investigate the issue that my hon. Friend has correctly raised.

As a matter of fairness, it is right to acknowledge that successive German Governments have tried to make amends for the heinous crimes that were carried out. Since the establishment of the federal republic, the German Government have tried to make some reparations to victims of Nazism in Germany and in other countries.

Immediately after the second world war, the occupying powers in Germany enacted laws designed to restore property confiscated by the Nazis to its original owners. Thereafter, one of the first acts of the new federal republic was an official expression of intent to make restitution for loss of property, for personal damage to the victims of Nazi persecution, for physical and psychological suffering, for unjust deprivation of freedom and for injury to people's professional or economic potential.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South, the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West and others have reminded the House of the horrors that occurred in the Holocaust. Those matters can never be put to rest and must never be forgotten. The House must be grateful to those hon. Members who remind us time and again of what can happen, even in Europe.

I hope that I have been able to show that the Government take seriously the questions raised by my hon. Friend. We may not be able to give answers on the specific timetables available, but I hope that my hon. Friend will accept in good faith that the Government are giving very serious consideration to the important points that he has raised—points not of history, but of crucial importance to us and to generations to come. We must never forget them.

Mr. Janner: Will the Minister assure the House that, when he says that the Government will consider the moral and legal implications before allowing a residue to be distributed, he means that they will not undertake a distribution until they have investigated where the residue came from? Please.

Dr. Fox: I think that I have made it clear that we intend a proper investigation. As I have said, we shall consider not only our legal obligations but what we regard as our moral obligations. That makes the point clearly.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twelve minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 13 November 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Cattle Head Deboning Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

9.34 am

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): When the BSE tragedy struck this country, I shared with my constituents a sense of distress for the cattle involved and for the agriculture community. I little thought that the BSE problem would have an immediate impact in Gosport, because it is not an agricultural area. We Gosportians—I grew up there, and I have represented the area for 22 years—are proud of our constituency, but the last thing we would claim for it is that it is an agricultural area. One will not see a pig or a sheep in Gosport. We have hardly a horse, scarcely a cow and only a handful of goats.

Because we have so few agricultural animals, we value Felicia park at Forton, which is a mildly eccentric and totally delightful farmlet where children can see live farm animals. Without that opportunity, they may not know what farm animals look or smell like in the flesh. I hope that Felicia park will continue, despite the development in that area.

It was, therefore, a surprise and a shock to receive a plea from a local firm for help following the BSE scandal. Pinnacle Meats has a serious problem: proportionately it is the worst problem of anyone affected by the BSE crisis. It was at that point that I learned about the cattle head deboning industry. I trust that hon. Members had a good breakfast before the debate.

I should say a few words about the trade so as to put the problem in context. Before March this year, cattle were killed in abattoirs and the bulk of the carcase was handled within the mainstream butchery trade. That business is vast: it is so large that it operates from enormous factories, its turnover is huge and its profit margin is correspondingly small in percentage terms. It will be important to bear that in mind when we consider the head meat boning industry later.

By contrast, the cattle head deboning business is tiny. It operates through about 12 firms, typically with 12 to 20 employees. It is a highly specialised part of the trade. It buys cow heads from abattoirs, takes them to purpose-built premises where the edible portions—mainly the cheek—are removed under strictly controlled conditions, and the remainder is dispatched for destruction, also under strictly controlled conditions.

Pinnacle Meats in Gosport is typical. It was set up by Graham Reed and John Gray in 1988, and established itself in the trade with four employees. United Kingdom and EC regulations became more stringent after 1988, and it was increasingly necessary for such small firms to buy specially designed equipment. In 1992, Pinnacle Meats moved to new premises in Gosport and took the lease on larger premises in an industrial estate. To carry on its business, it had to invest in expensive, specialised equipment.

The company had to comply with the EC cutting plant licence for 1992, and the cattle head deboning regulations imposed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which applied from August 1995. I am told that that is the only part of the meat distribution trade in which producers require a special licence.

The rules were strict. I visited Pinnacle Meats and I saw the way in which the rules were observed. The cattle heads were kept at regulated temperatures from the moment of slaughter to the moment of dispatch from the cattle head deboning plant. Temperatures and cleanliness were vetted at every stage by MAFF officials, who had right of entry at all times. The quality of the meat was vetted on arrival at the deboner's premises, and there were strict rules to ensure that the paths of the raw material and the product did not cross.

Record keeping was, by regulation, meticulous, and it had to be available to MAFF inspectors at all times. There were daily audits of stocks, with reconciliation of input and output. Maintaining those standards was expensive. At a cost of £300,000, Pinnacle installed epoxy resined floors, special wall cladding, metal detectors, code-printing weighing scales, vacuum-packed conveyor systems and a special scissor lift to enable the product to be loaded directly into a specially designed bay. The equipment was highly specialised, and referable only to the business of cattle head deboning. Those who have visited any such premises in any part of the country will know that there is no way of readily transferring equipment of that kind and using it to operate any other kind of business in the meat industry, or other industries. It is purpose designed.

As I have said, all that cost about £300,000. Most of the businesses involved were small family businesses. As hon. Members will know, it is normal for banks lending money to small family businesses not just to lend on the security of the company, but to require the security of the home of the proprietors. Pinnacle is typical of many small firms—the trade was chiefly concentrated among smaller firms—in that its proprietors borrowed against the security of their homes. They borrowed because they were told that they had to in order to comply with the regulations. In other words, the Government told them that they must spend the money to stay in business, and they had to take up the security of mortgages on their houses in order to do that.

In that way, Pinnacle and other companies built up a useful and profitable business. Pinnacle was deboning about 300,000 cow heads a year, providing a useful service to abattoirs and purchasers of the product and a profitable business for their employees. The process usually involved the removal of cheek meat, some of which was considered a delicacy. Pinnacle, for instance, exported 10 tonnes of cheek meat a month to France, where it is sold as a delicacy—joue de boeuf. Hon. Members who have had the opportunity to eat joue de boeuf in the Crillon may not know that it probably came from the industrial estate in Gosport. That was a matter of pride to my constituents—until 29 March 1996.

[Mr. Peter Viggers]

Until that day, the business was providing joue de boeuf, meat spreads, sausages, hamburgers and other meat products throughout the United Kingdom and, indeed, Europe. Graham Reed and his partner had a sound, profitable business; they employed 25 people, who produced food in strictly controlled conditions. Then came the BSE scare, and the Government reacted by taking action against cattle. On 29 March 1996 they passed the Specified Bovine Material Order, which states that the whole of the heads of cattle that died in the United Kingdom, apart from the tongues, constitute specified bovine material that may not be sold for human or animal consumption. People who had profitable businesses on 28 March 1996 woke on 30 March to discover that those businesses had been destroyed. I reiterate that they had borrowed money that they now had no way of repaying, because they had no businesses.

Let me make two points about the Specified Bovine Material Order. First, there is nothing wrong with head meat. Foreign head meat is still being sold. It is head meat from cattle that die in the United Kingdom that cannot be sold for human or agricultural consumption; foreign head meat can be and is being sold in this country. We have become importers, rather than having a profitable export trade—Pinnacle had an export trade worth £15,000 a month to France alone. That is because the authorities in the United Kingdom are concerned only about the possibility that the method of slaughter used in UK abattoirs will lead to contamination of head meat. They are not bothered about head meat from other parts of the world. Head meat that is eaten now can come from anywhere other than Britain.

Secondly, no one has ever suggested that the UK cattle head deboners have any done anything wrong. They were controlled, and operated in a sterile environment; their businesses were well run and efficient. It is in no way their fault that they have been put out of business—for that is what has happened. The order of 29 March made the product illegal, and ended the trade.

Hon. Members may ask why the deboners do not go and do something else. The trade was highly specialised: it operated on specialised premises, and with specialised equipment. Pinnacle's blast freezer capacity was 30 tonnes a week, which is minuscule in comparison with that of larger meat producers. As I explained earlier, the larger producers operate with vast quantities, and because of that they work on tiny margins. It is impossible for a head deboner who, because of his specialised trade, was working on a margin of about 10 per cent. to compete with the mainstream meat business, which typically operates on margins of between 0.5 per cent. and 1 per cent.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): Can my hon. Friend confirm that the circumstances that he has described are the same in all similar bovine head deboning companies around the country, such as H. J. Wilson in my constituency? The point is that the owners of such concerns never had time to look for other business. They had all borrowed heavily to meet the requirements of the regulations, and on the day on which the order came into force they had no choice but to close their businesses. They did not have the option of looking elsewhere, because of the Government's determination to take action to restore confidence. Why should the owners of such companies bear the brunt of the cost and the anguish of losing their homes because of action that was taken allegedly for the wider good?

Mr. Viggers: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Over the past eight months or so, I have been struck by the similarity of many points put to me by hon. Members.

A trade like cattle head deboning might be expected to range from tiny one-man businesses to larger businesses employing between 50 and 100 people. Not at all: the nature of the trade lends itself very well to businesses employing about 20 people. Typically, these are family businesses, although there are one or two instances of deboning being carried out by larger companies. They were proud of what they were doing, and they had borrowed in order to comply with European regulations. In almost every case, they did not have enough capital to continue unless they borrowed. Virtually all the firms in the trade were small family businesses, which borrowed against the security of houses and subsequently went bankrupt when they had to close. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) for citing a company in his constituency.

It is not possible to switch from deboning cattle heads to deboning the heads of pigs or sheep. Some companies have tried, but purpose-built premises such as theirs do not lend themselves efficiently to any other business. It can be done, but it is rather like using a Ferrari to go shopping. This is a highly specialised business, which does not compete well in the normal field of the meat trade.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Is the hon. Gentleman aware—as I have been made aware—that the Government have now instructed abattoirs not to process sheep heads? That alternative has been closed off. Apparently, however, the abattoirs are being compensated for the loss of their business, whereas cattle head deboners are not. Is that fair or consistent?

Mr. Viggers: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Let me take this opportunity of saying that concern about the issue extends across the House and, indeed, across the United Kingdom.

I was not aware of the position that the hon. Gentleman describes, but the inconsistencies in regard to compensation are such that, in my view, the present situation is untenable. I cannot look my constituents in the eye and defend what is currently happening.

If we accept that those companies cannot readily move to any other kind of business, we must also accept that the only answer is compensation. By temperament, I am not one to demand compensation for everything—I am laissez-faire on the more hard-right wing—but in this instance, I feel that points should be made on behalf of our constituents. They should be given the opportunity to set up in some other business, perhaps parallel, but different from the business that they were in before. So what of compensation? Would it set a precedent?

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for not being able to stay for the full debate due to Select Committee business, but is there not an inconsistency in that the Prime Minister talks of

compensation for farmers while the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food talks about stabilising the market? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, once we land in the area of compensation, we are inevitably driven to the compelling nature of the deboners' case, as the Home Secretary was driven last night into saying that he was initially prepared to compensate only for the loss of handguns, but now accepted that he probably had to give compensation for ancillary materials. It is always difficult to argue by analogy, but there is a parallel here that the Government should consider. There is grave injustice for the people needing compensation.

Mr. Viggers: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Over the months, he and I have maintained contact on the subject of compensation and on the difficulties suffered by the trade. It is good of him to find time in advance of his Select Committee to come to the Chamber to support the plea for compensation.

Would compensation set a precedent? I have conducted a little research. I gather that the Oral Snuff (Safety) Regulations 1989/2345 is one sort of parallel, but when oral snuff was banned by the Government with that regulation the people who distributed oral snuff did not suffer particularly because other parts of the tobacco trade made up for the loss. Similarly, the Asbestos (Prohibitions) Regulations 1992/3067 caused some difficulty in the building trade, but few companies specialised in asbestos.

I tried to find a parallel for the Government, by edict, banning a business. The advice that I was given earlier this year by the House of Commons Library ran as follows:

"I have been unable to find a comparable example of a recent Order with as dramatic an effect as the one to which your enquiry relates".

So it sounds as if this is unprecedented.

Let us look for other parallels. The BSE orders allow farmers to be compensated. In a letter to me on 17 July 1996, the Prime Minister said:

"our policy is to target support at those sectors which are essential for a secure and efficient beef supply chain".

Bully for the beef supply chain, but what about the people who cannot carry on and who have been driven out of business?

Another parallel is salmonella. Since 1989, compensation has been paid to chicken farmers for their entire flock, on a varying basis from 60 per cent. to 100 per cent. of its value. The hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) put his finger on the latest example. It is only 12 hours ago, almost to the minute, that I, for the first time in my 22 years in the House, voted against the Government. I did so on the issue of compensation and gun control.

The Government have decided to ban most handguns and to compensate handgun owners. On legal advice yesterday, the Home Secretary told the House that he would also be compensating for equipment. He was specifically asked—the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North made the point and I reiterate it—by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) about compensation for people in the gun business. He said:

"is it not clear that it would be grossly unjust if the money resolution did not cover people who have businesses—for example, shooting ranges with long leases—that will no longer receive any revenue? They are likely to go bankrupt . . . Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure us that the money resolution will cover such people so that the House can debate the point?"

The Home Secretary replied:

"My right hon. Friend is unaware of the precise terms of the revised resolution. I cannot give him the total assurance that he requests, but I have said—I hope that he will take comfort from it—that in deciding the precise scope of the revised money resolution we shall take full account of points made in the debate today, including the point that he has just made."

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Tony Baldry): My hon. Friend is in danger of misleading himself. If he reads on, he will find that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary went on to deal specifically with that point again. Referring to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), he referred to the distinction

"from claims for compensation for loss of trade and business. So far as I am aware, there is no precedent for such claims and I would arouse false hopes and expectations if I were to give my right hon. and hon. Friends any comfort on that point. There is a clear distinction between the two."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. 181-2.]

The Home Secretary said that there is a clear distinction between loss of money in relation to accessories and loss in relation to a business.

Mr. Viggers: That is not the point. I was in the House and I recall the moment well. I prefer the Home Secretary's first reply to his second.

For the sake of argument, let me accept the point of my hon. Friend the Minister of State. I regret the ban on handguns, but if they are to be banned, I suppose that the owners should be compensated. Where is the principle in all this? If it is fair, right and in the public interest to compensate a gun owner for the loss of his gun, which is part of his sport and his hobby, how much more must it be right to compensate someone who has been made bankrupt by Government edict? Surely that is a much more forceful point.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the case is slightly stronger than even he makes out? People who may, unfortunately, have bought guns that are no longer available, at least bought them of their own volition. The vast majority of the debt of the deboners whom we are discussing has been incurred for machinery and expenses. It was incurred not on the volition of the owner or the deboners, but precisely because of Government and European legislation. Those deboners are being doubly punished, first, by spending the money at the Government's direction and, secondly, in being that by a second Government edict that they have no way of repaying that money.

Mr. Viggers: That is absolutely right. To comply with Government requirements, these people spent and borrowed money to bring their premises up to standard. That is precisely the point.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): May I say to my hon. Friend the Minister of State that there is no parallel here. I listened extremely carefully to what my right hon. and learned Friend Home Secretary said yesterday. He was talking about loss of trade or business in future. What we are talking about, on behalf of our constituents, is an ex

[Mr. Robert Key]

gratia payment—if the Government do not like the term "compensation"—for the confiscation of private property to meet the Government's requirements, as advised by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee. That surely, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) would agree, is the point. We are talking not about loss of trade and business in future, but about recompense for confiscation.

Mr. Viggers: The interventions in my speech have again made clear how widely the feeling of anger is shared by hon. Members. Clearly, it goes across the United Kingdom and affects every part of the UK. It is shared by all parties in the House. We have been stirred to anger on behalf of our constituents and we expect something to be done about it.

Mr. Batiste: May I ask my hon. Friend to draw a specific distinction between compensating companies for the equipment that they have had to buy to meet their trade, as opposed to a more theoretical argument about future loss of earnings? There is an exact parallel with guns. On the day after the Government's announcement on guns, an ammunition factory in my constituency closed because no business was left for it. Overnight, all the specialist equipment, which is just as specialist as deboners' equipment, became worthless.

Mr. Viggers: I understand that the Government did not start negotiating, but were prepared to receive information from the industry to calibrate the amount of compensation that would be required. I understand that the trade responded by putting together a compilation—I have a copy here—showing that the gross overall value of the trade was about £11 million. The amount of money spent to comply with regulations in the past three or four years was calculated at about £2.25 million. I am told that the trade was optimistic that negotiations would take place, leading to compensation, and that those negotiations, or preliminary discussions, were broken off. The Government are not now prepared to receive information about the value of the trade. Those are the figures should the Government decide to compensate. I support the claims of those who enjoy the sport of shooting, but the claims of the head deboners are absolutely justified, and they have an overwhelming case.

The Minister will have had his speech prepared for him by civil servants who put together what are known as building blocks. The essential building block will be the argument that has been put to me in reply to many letters and parliamentary questions about compensation, so the Minister will read to us:

"The reason is that we are not able"—

Mr. Baldry: Let me help my hon. Friend because, so far, he has failed totally to address the main point of the debate, and I fear that he has been misled by the House of Commons Library on the Skoal case. Lord Justice Taylor said about that case that is would be wrong for the Government to pay compensation where Parliament, with proper and due diligence, has caused a business to suffer. He said that there was no right to compensation if a business was lost as a consequence of that. That was the judgment of the High Court as recently as 1990. No compensation was offered as a result of the statutory instruments to which my hon. Friend referred, and I fear that he has been misled by the Library.

The point that my hon. Friend has not so far addressed in his speech, and which mine will deal with because I did draft it, is the concept of settled public policy. No Government at any time have ever paid any compensation for the loss of business—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I would prefer to see the Minister's face rather than his back.

Mr. Baldry: No Government at any time have paid compensation for the loss of business, consequent upon a decision of Parliament. My hon. Friend must deal with that fact, but he has yet to do so.

Mr. Viggers: Let me range a little more widely. If my following comments sound irrelevant, I hope to prove their relevance.

I came to the House in 1974 and I was told about a group of widows called the pre-1950s widows. They were the widows of men below the rank of W1, who retired before 1 August 1950 and who did not receive a service pension. For five years I campaigned on behalf of those widows. I did everything: I introduced 10-minute Bills, tabled early-day motions and initiated late-night debates on the subject. I remember that at one Conservative charity ball I waltzed the then Mrs. Thatcher around the floor and I told her about the case, and she took an interest in it.

I am extremely proud of that five-year campaign on behalf of the pre-1950s widows. Every time I raised the issue in the House, a Minister stood at the Dispatch Box and said that there was no precedent and that it was absolutely impossible to do anything for those women. I was told that the Government could not make ex gratia payments to service widows. Eventually, however, Sir Keith Joseph stood at the Dispatch Box and said that although the rules said we could not do it, the broad view revealed that it was not fair and that we had to compensate them. We did it—we gave service pensions to those widows. It took five years of campaigning and I had five years of Ministers telling me that it was impossible, but then we did it.

I retract my earlier comment to my hon. Friend the Minister about his speech being drafted for him by civil servants. Of course he wrote his own; I always wrote my own speeches when I was a Minister. Other Ministers, however, have explained the refusal to pay compensation to deboners as follows:

"The reason is that we are not able to make exceptions to the policy of targeting aid at the essential links in the beef supply chain. If we did, we would need to extend the exceptions to cover claims from other groups. We have looked very hard at whether head de-boners could be defined as a unique group but we have concluded this is unfortunately not possible."

I do not accept that the problem is insoluble. In 1534 this House agreed that King Henry VIII was head of the Church. If it can do that, it can do anything. If this House said that tomorrow is Wednesday or Saturday, subject to European regulations of course, it would be because this House is virtually omnipotent. Where there is a will, a way can be found. I ask my hon. Friend and his colleagues to look again at the issue and find a way to compensate that small industry.

10.4 am

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I congratulate the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) on obtaining this Adjournment debate. I also congratulate him on making such an excellent case for such hard-working people. He has covered every problem that they face.

The Glasgow meat market is based in my constituency. I was contacted by Mrs. Fyfe who worked in the meat trade and I was horrified to hear that on a Thursday evening she received a fax from civil servants at the Scottish Office instructing her to stop trading. I challenge the Minister's argument about the decision of Parliament, because Mrs. Fyfe's business was closed down on the instructions of civil servants. From the Friday, Mrs. Fyfe and others had to cease work.

As the hon. Member for Gosport said, it was not so long before that that the same civil servants instructed Mrs. Fyfe and others who work at the Glasgow meat market that, to comply with European Community standards, they had to buy the necessary equipment for their particular trade. Mrs. Fyfe had to go to her bank and say that she had been instructed to buy certain equipment because of EC regulations. She said that she needed a loan to keep herself, her husband, her daughter and her four employees in a job. The bank said that that was fine and agreed to give her a loan, but she had to put up not only her business as security, but her home.

I have been a Member of the House for 17 years. I have heard Ministers say how we must encourage small businesses, which are the answer. We have been told that we cannot bring great big factories into cities like Glasgow but we can encourage people to show initiative. I remember when Mrs. Thatcher said the Government would encourage people to show initiative, get on their bikes and create small businesses. The argument was that a small business may employ four or five people, and other businesses with similar numbers of employees may develop, so before long a group of people are in work and have the dignity of employment.

Mrs. Fyfe's husband was a black cab driver in the city of Glasgow. He was out in all weathers and at all hours to raise the money to start their business off. The Fyfes did not make a fantastic living from it, but they earned enough probably to enjoy a decent holiday every year. It was hard work for them, but now they have been left with no livelihood.

The Fyfes have not said to me that they are looking for big money, but, as the hon. Member for Gosport has already said, they want compensation to claw back the money they had to spend to meet EC regulations. They want something to enable them to start up another business. It must be appalling to have to say to four or five people, "I am sorry, but I have to let you go." We are not talking about a big organisation, where the employer may pay off people he does not know. Mrs. Fyfe may have employed just four people, but those men and women have worked for her for 20 years. She knows them and their families. She knows the consequences of telling them that she must lay them off. In a city like Glasgow if a person is over the age of 40 the chances of re-employment are slim, especially when the industry that formerly employed him has been closed down.

I went to see Lord Lindsay, and he said, "No, I am not compensating farmers." I could only scratch my head, because all that I had been hearing from the Agriculture Minister was that he would look after farmers. Lord Lindsay said, "No, we are not compensating farmers. We are intervening and buying their cattle." It is a rose by another name. I do not mind if we call it "intervention" for the beef industry, but let us provide compensation.

I was a trade union official. Sometimes bosses would say, "I'm not going to pay overtime, but I'll give good expenses." No one complained if expenses were equivalent to the amount of overtime that people deserved. They could call overtime whatever they liked. If Ministers wish to call compensation "intervention", I shall be happy to go to Mrs. Fyfe and other people who work in the industry in Scotland and tell them, "I'm sorry; they're not going to give you compensation, but they will give you intervention." I would be as happy as Larry with that—as I am sure the hon. Member for Gosport and other hon. Members would be.

I think back to the most recent debate we had on the problems in agriculture and to the words of the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross), who said that the BSE problem does not start and stop at the farm gate, but that it goes beyond and into meat markets and into industries such as head deboning. The Government must face up to that fact. In a few months, as culled cattle enter slaughterhouses, there will be serious problems. The effect of any decision made by Parliament is that some people—such as Mrs. Fyfe—will lose their livelihood, but, as in this case, within the year, other people will become millionaires.

The Government are prepared to pay about £40 per head of cattle that goes to a slaughterhouse. People conducting the slaughter will be able to sell the cattle hides for approximately £20. I am not very good at mathematics and failed my mathematics exam, which is probably why I am a Member of Parliament, but even I can understand that, with 5,000 cattle per week in Scotland—I do not know the overall number for the UK—we are talking about a very large number.

The cattle that will be slaughtered are not suffering from the disease. They are healthy beasts—but the situation must make farmers sick. I do not know much about the farming industry, but I know that a farmer will sit up all night with an ill beast, and that he will spend more on vet's bills for his cattle than he probably would spend on doctors' bills for his family. He knows his responsibility. Farmers will have to take healthy cattle to slaughterhouses because of the Government's actions. But that is another matter.

Mark my words: many millionaires will be created because of this. It is a crying shame that people such as Mrs. Fyfe and those mentioned by the hon. Member for Gosport have to suffer. Those men and women have made great sacrifices. They did not clock in at 8 am and clock out at 5 pm. They worked long hours, and, after working those hours, they sent in reports to civil servants at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and then did their bookkeeping. We are talking about small family businesses.

I do not like attacking any hon. Member who is not present in the Chamber, because that is not the done thing. However, I was appalled when I saw on television the way in which the Agriculture Minister conducted himself

[Mr. Michael J. Martin]

in Europe. It did not help the men and women who are losing out when they saw him strutting about Europe wearing a 1930s-style hat and two watches, like an eccentric Englishman. People's appearance makes a difference, especially if they are in a position of responsibility. The Minister's press conferences and arrogant manner did not help or inspire confidence in people whose livelihoods depend on his decisions.

We are not talking about a great deal of money for compensation. I ask only that people be compensated for improvements that they made in their businesses, which were required by a decision made by Parliament.

10.15 am

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) on saying everything that I would have wished to say. He has, therefore, considerably shortened my speech on those points. I am grateful for that, because I can now say something extra.

It gives me no pleasure at all to be critical of the Government when, at last, matters seem to be coming right for our farming industry. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on the way in which the cull is starting to make a deep impression on the crisis in the countryside. The situation is coming right. However, one problem is not coming right.

On 20 March 1996, my hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food made a statement to the House on BSE. I asked him about the paramount importance of food safety and the need for market support mechanisms. The answer he gave could not have been clearer. He said:

"People sometimes suggest that the interests of agriculture and farmers are MAFF's overriding concern, and obviously they are of great concern to us; but our paramount duty is to public safety—the safety of the food chain and of British food. That is the paramount duty owed by my Department, and myself as Minister to the House and the country."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. 396.]

He cared, most of all, for the food industry.

On 28 March 1996, at Agriculture Question Time, I raised the issue of head deboners, warning of the closure of food processing plants. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), replied:

"While I sympathise with, and have every concern for, my hon. Friend's dilemma, it would be quite wrong for the Government to challenge the scientific advice that we have accepted at this Dispatch Box."—[*Official Report*, 28 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. 1160.]

She said that she had every concern for my dilemma. I was not asking for the Government to challenge the scientific advice.

Nine months later, it is demonstrably clear that the interests of agriculture and farmers are MAFF's overriding concern, and that "every concern" does not extend to the head deboning industry. Nine months later, I am posed another dilemma. On today's Order Paper, I see that my right hon. Friend the Agriculture Minister invites me to congratulate

"the Government on the action it has taken to deal with the BSE crisis",

and to welcome

"the package of support the Government has provided to the beef industry".

That is, indeed, a dilemma.

I think of the case of Touchmead Ltd., in Amesbury—an important town in my constituency, which has suffered job losses because of the situation. I shall listen carefully to what Ministers say in this debate, and in the debate later today, before I decide whether I can, in all conscience, support the Government today.

Mr. Batiste: My hon. Friend touched on a very powerful issue. If there is a need, in the public interest, to take action—as, for example, in the case of guns or of beef—we can agree with the principle, but the action must be applied with justice if the Government want to have the support of their Back Benchers. That is the message that the Minister should take away from this debate.

Mr. Key: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I shall now reinforce the point that he has so clearly made.

Touchmead Ltd. of Amesbury constructed a whole new plant. It moved out of the centre of town to a countryside location. It did so to conform to new regulations. In 1995, that new plant was once again upgraded. The head deboning section was renewed. The firm was working for the quality end of the market, supplying some of the best-known food chains in the country. It was a major exporter of some of its products, particularly to France, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport has pointed out. "Waste not, want not" was a pretty worthy phrase to use with regard to head deboners—a little-known part of the British food chain.

We are talking about large quantities of food. Touchmead Ltd. was dealing with 800 bovine heads and 900 porcine heads a day, and a tonne of bovine flank and rib and two tonnes of offal every week. A veterinary report on the company said that public health risks were very well catered for. It continued:

"Particular attention has to be paid to the safe handling and disposal of Specified Bovine Offal. Changes have been made in the handling techniques with the advent of the new guidelines.

The present management has a very positive attitude to meat hygiene. They regard themselves as being at the forefront of their particular field. They often turn to the OVS"—

the official veterinary surgeon—

"for help and guidance in the resolution of meat hygiene related problems.

As the proprietor is always anxious to seek new markets, a considerable effort has to be made to ensure that he is aware of the requirements for these.

Because of the restricted hours of attendance it has been our"—

the vets—

"deliberate policy to vary the time of day at which we attend the plant."

That report was made on 26 February.

On 28 March, I received a letter from the veterinary officer who was responsible to MAFF for looking after that company. He said:

"This purpose built factory conforming to EEC standards has been visited by us on every working day for the past 2 years.

In our opinion they carry out a good job in their function of removing useable meat from bovine and pig heads for further processing.

To our knowledge they have complied with all requirements from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, where necessary amending their techniques to conform to any new legislation.

We feel it is ridiculous for their factory to be under threat of closure due to proposed changes in legislation which are likely to prohibit the use of any useable meat derived from bovine heads."

On 29 March, Touchmead Ltd. was closed by the Government. A decision was taken somewhere along the line not to pay any compensation. There is no alternative use for the deboning capital equipment, and the irony, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport has said, is that imports are continuing of foreign head meat—meat subject to less stringent controls than our own.

I feel very sorry for my hon. Friend the Minister. It is a peril of collective responsibility that he has drawn the short straw today. I would rather see my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, with whom I have had many discussions on the matter, sitting on the Front Bench. Ultimately, of course, it is his decision whether this tiny amount, this maximum of £11 million, is paid. Farmers have received £2.5 billion to cope with the crisis that affects them.

A line always has to be drawn somewhere concerning any payment and it is the unpleasant duty of Ministers, acting on the advice of their civil servants and MAFF's accounting officer, to decide where to draw it. Clearly, with such decisions, natural justice should not be offended. The decision should not be arbitrary but should properly take into account all relevant factors—in this case, compulsory new investment. The decision taken by the Government not to pay anything to the small number of firms in the head deboning industry is unfair. It offends natural justice and it is arbitrary. That is bad government. I do not mind whether the help is called compensation, ex gratia payments, intervention or market support. If there is no precedent, it is time to set one. Mention has already been made of firearms, salmonella in eggs and other inconsistencies.

During the BSE crisis, the Government have been accused of many things. Let us face it, that is partly because 80 per cent. of hon. Members do not understand rural affairs very well. They do not therefore understand that the entire rural industry—be it animal feed, machinery or Land Rover dealers—has been shaken by BSE and the cash flow in the rural economy has simply stopped. Even lawyers and accountants have had to wait for their bills to be paid. The banks have been very understanding about head deboners. I talked to the bank manager concerned and he was very helpful. I talked to the collectors of taxes on behalf of my friends in the head deboning industry, and they were very understanding. The Inland Revenue has behaved impeccably. Even travel agents have been affected by the BSE crisis in the industry. Things are becoming right at last—but not on cattle head deboning.

What has happened to the head deboners did not happen to farmers, who have been through hell but have at least had £2.5 billion to help them during the crisis. What has happened to the deboners did not happen to the livestock transport firms, which have been very busy indeed. I dare say that some of the people involved will end up millionaires, and good luck to them. The same did not happen to the abattoirs or the renderers, which have worked very hard and are doing very nicely, and good luck to them. The same did not even happen to the livestock markets. They lost massive revenue but could limp through the crisis, and their market trade is returning. The head deboning industry will never return. The Government had to act on SEAC's advice, but they did not have to confiscate private property, put hundreds of people out of work and not pay a penny piece to help.

It is the ill-fortune of the deboning industry that it comes within the remit of MAFF. The DTI would not have treated it in the same way, nor would the Department of Health. The industry got tangled up in MAFF and has been treated as the tail-end Charlie of this awful crisis. One Minister has been quoted as saying recently,

"there is no cattle head deboning industry and that's tough".

It is especially tough for Mr. and Mrs. Ron Styles and their 60 former employees, who did everything that was asked of them and have been let down.

What is to be done? It is not too late. The Government do not have to wait to be forced into action by the courts. There is something else, of course, that they can do: contribute the modest amount of money that we are asking for on behalf of our constituents. When the nightmare of BSE is behind us and farmers, consumers and the food industry have regained their old confidence and worldwide markets once again respond to the excellence of British food from British farmers, we shall have to revisit the reform of MAFF itself. The food production industry can hold its own with any industry. It belongs in the DTI, and so does the fishing industry, given the chance.

Land stewardship and land use are increasingly integrated into the responsibilities of the Department of the Environment. Perhaps those functions belong there. Food regulations and standards should long ago have gone to the Department of Health. Consumers would prefer that and as a result would have more confidence than they do in the self-policing of poor old MAFF.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North–East): I was rather hoping that the hon. Gentleman would tell us about the consequences of the closure of the company in his constituency for the people who ran it. The principals of two companies in my constituency—Lilacmead and A. J. and J. A. Cattermole Ltd.—have lost their businesses and their homes as a result of the crisis. Was that the consequence of Touchmead's closure as well?

Mr. Key: Two generations of the Styles family, the owners of the business who started it from nothing in the town of Amesbury, have been affected. More than 60 families have been directly affected due to lay-offs as a result of the arbitrary action. Many, I am glad to say, have been re-employed, but too many have not.

After the BSE crisis, we need to make a new start. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister, even at this stage, not just to tell us that there is no precedent and that he can do nothing about the problem but to be prepared to look again on behalf of all our constituents, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport has so eloquently requested, to see whether a way through can be found. We do not mind what the help is called, but we do mind about the reputation of good government.

10.29 am

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I join other hon. Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) not just on securing this debate, but on the

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

consistent work that he has done from the outset on behalf of head boners. I know that that work is appreciated on both sides of the House and across the country. We welcome the fact that the hon. Gentleman is continuing to press the case and we are glad to have the opportunity to back him up.

I have said before that my constituency is probably more affected by the BSE crisis than any other. It is affected across the range of the industry, from hill farms to abattoirs—there are two abattoirs in my constituency, but with the new boundaries there will be three. I represent a range of aspects of the meat processing industry. To take some of the edge off his support for the Government's measures on the cattle cull, I can tell the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) and the House that Scottish farmers will not be satisfied until the Florence agreement is implemented and the selective cull is in process. That is essential before the ban can be lifted or a timetable for that lifting can be drawn up. The industry is 30 per cent. dependent on exports.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): The situation is worse in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Bruce: I understand that the proportion is even greater there. We need progress towards the lifting of the ban.

We are addressing the particular problems of the head boners this morning. Mr. John Troup, who lives in Deystone in my constituency, was the principal of T and T Meats, a small company that used to exist in Aberdeen. He is in the same desperate plight as other hon. Members have had to bring to the attention of the House. His small business employed five people, specialising exclusively in taking the meat off cattle heads. He was trading profitably, making between £50,000 and £60,000 on the business in the previous full financial year. He had reinvested that money in the business and, like others, had extended the mortgage on his house.

Mr. Troup is desperately fighting a rearguard action to save his house, working as a fish packer to get some money to try to meet his basic overheads. His wife has been forced to abandon the further education course that she was pursuing and take a manual job in an attempt to keep enough cash coming in to avoid the house being recovered by the building society.

That is the effect on a previously successful small business that has been closed down by Government edict. The Government have said only that they are not paying compensation because it is not Government policy to do so. There is no legal remit: the Government have simply decided not to.

I have a letter—I am sure that other hon. Members have similar letters—from Lord Lindsay, the Scottish Office Minister responsible for agriculture, to the solicitors representing the Scottish head boners. He says:

"I sympathise with the head deboners"—

I am afraid that sympathy will not be enough—

"whose business activities have been greatly affected by the measures introduced on 29 March and I fully understand the difficulties this has presented for them;"—

I wonder whether he does—

"but as has been made clear previously, the purpose of the financial assistance which the Government has made available is to provide market support to keep the essential links in the beef supply chain operating while companies adjust to the changed market circumstances. It is not, and has never been, Government policy to utilise public funds to compensate businesses for losses incurred as a consequence of decisions taken to strengthen public health controls."

That says only that it is a policy because it is a policy. The House must recognise that the distress of those businesses requires the Government to revisit the policy and decide what to do about it.

We are not talking about business failure resulting from the cumulative effect of a number of measures over time. We are talking about people who went to work as usual one morning to find a fax on the machine telling them to cease business immediately—the same day—without compensation and that disregarding that fax would be a criminal offence. That is quite different from going out of business because of various measures that make the business non-viable, which usually allows for some time to readjust and retrieve something, rather than having the entire business taken away.

I understand that the Association of Cattle Head De-Boners is taking the Government to the European Court of Human Rights. Lord Lester QC has advised that there is no domestic remedy, but the European route has a high probability of success. The association's solicitors say:

"the Junior Counsel engaged on the drafting of the documentation believes that the chances of the members succeeding has increased greatly since the initial consultation with Lord Lester."

I do not want to intrude on the Government's grief in their experiences in European courts, but it would surely be better for them to face up to their domestic responsibilities than for the issue to be resolved in the European Court of Human Rights, creating another cause of potential humiliation and perhaps anger in some quarters of the Government. They can avoid that by taking action in advance.

The issue may not affect many businesses or jobs—I think that the estimation is that 100 jobs will be affected in Scotland—but the loss of livelihood for the individuals involved is of unprecedented proportions, coming with no warning or opportunity to find any other compensation or alternative business. Whatever the Minister's brief, I hope that he will not close options and will undertake to revisit the issue. Saying simply that the Government have no policy to pay compensation is not a good enough answer. These people deserve compensation. They were doing their business and had their livelihoods removed as a direct result of a faxed instruction from the Government. The Government must accept their responsibility.

10.35 am

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) on his determination and persistence in pursuing the case for the head boning industry and on the eloquent way in which he has put the case this morning, which will allow me to be comparatively brief.

Until the beginning of the year, I was unaware of the existence of the head boning industry. I became aware of it when I received a letter from my hon. Friend the

Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food informing me that a firm in my constituency, Latchingdon Fresh Meats, had failed to make the necessary changes to its premises to comply with the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995.

The proprietor, Mr. Ken Pearson, had requested a derogation, but my hon. Friend was minded to turn it down. However, she offered to meet Mr. Pearson, and we met on 19 February. I pay tribute to her sympathetic and understanding attitude. As a result of that meeting, it was agreed that Mr. Pearson would make the necessary changes. He has spent some £30,000 to bring his premises up to European requirements. That is a substantial sum for a business of that size, but he was able to borrow the money because he was running a thriving, successful business. The business concentrated on the sale of fresh meats, but 40 per cent. of it was in head boning. He was boning some 400 ox heads a week.

The Government's announcement six weeks later wiped out that part of his business at a stroke. He immediately had to lay off two people and was left with £15,000 worth of virtually unsaleable stock. The loss of the ox head boning business also affected the rest of his business, more than halving his turnover. Six months later, after the Government's measures, he is just about going, but it is still a struggle.

Although there are only about 30 head boning firms in the country, I soon discovered that a second one, Pearce Meats, was also located in my constituency. Bigger than Latchingdon Fresh Meats, it is exclusively a head boning business. Before the Government's measures, it was boning some 2,000 ox heads, and between 4,500 and 5,000 pig heads a week. The Government's measures have wiped out between 25 per cent. and 30 per cent. of its business. The company immediately had to lay off four people.

Like Mr. Pearson, Pearce Meats had also invested to meet European standards—some £80,000 to £100,000 during the previous four years. On each ox head, it previously made a profit of about £3. The Government's ban immediately cost the company around £6,000 a week. As a result of expanding the pig head business, Mr. Pearce has just about got the company back into profit, but it has taken four months, during which he did not think that his business could possibly survive. Those whom he was forced to lay off have not found new jobs.

The general point, which was well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport, is that, whether the ban was justified is arguable; foreign head meat is still being sold. However, I accept that the ban is here to stay. The point is that both firms in my constituency did everything that they were required to do. They invested substantial sums at the behest of the Government yet, a few months later, the Government wiped out their business at a stroke.

Unlike other parts of the meat processing industry, which will recover in time, there is no prospect of recovery for the head boning industry, yet it is the other parts of the industry that have been given substantial sums in compensation. I must tell my hon. Friend the Minister that that is unjust. The amounts involved are not great, but my constituents deserve better treatment than they have so far received. I urge my hon. Friend to listen to the arguments and to give us something today that we can take back to our constituents.

10.39 am

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): The number of hon. Members who wish to speak in this debate is testimony to the breadth of support for the case put by the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers). I will make my remarks as brief as possible so that other hon. Members can participate.

I have no pecuniary or commercial interest in the matter, and I have no specialised knowledge of it—indeed, I find it difficult to pronounce some of the words associated with this great problem, far less get my mind round them. However, I have two interests in the matter. One, of course, is public health; the other is that I know an injustice when I see one and I believe that there is an injustice in this case.

We need not rehearse what happened on 29 March or before, but I want to make two points, the first of which has been made by everyone. I wrote to the Minister as soon as the injustice of the case was brought to my attention by a company in my constituency, as was the case with other hon. Members. I refer to Wilson Young Ltd., part of the National Products Company in Shotts. I have still not had a satisfactory answer or explanation. Why were companies based in the United Kingdom, even in areas such as Scotland with an extremely low incidence of BSE, prohibited from entering the trade, when the same products could be imported from countries that had instances of BSE, some on a small scale but some on a par with the Scottish experience?

The most important issue is compensation. On 29 March, my constituency firm was hit by a whirlwind. We have heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) and for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke), and from the hon. Member for Gosport, about faxes saying, "Cease trading immediately." That is what happened in my constituency.

The Minister should think again. I am left, as are other hon. Members, with constituents who have complied with every Government regulation, observed the rules as laid down by the Government and the EC and who have invested in machinery specifically for the purpose. Compensation is available for farmers, for market support to help the essential links and supply chains, for abattoirs and for the beef stock transfer scheme, but none of that offers any consolation to people such as our constituents.

Head meats sourced from outside the UK are a sufficient problem, but when there is no compensation at all, their importation adds a gross injustice to an insult to many of our people. In most cases, the debts were incurred neither as a result of investing to speculate and to accumulate nor as a risk taken on the market, but as a direct result of Government instructions and Government regulations. It seems to me that there is a clear distinction between compensation for future trading profits and recompense for debt incurred as a direct result of Government instruction. I plead with the Minister, as other hon. Members have, to rethink the Government's position and to make some recompense to people whose lives were destroyed on 29 March.

10.43 am

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Tony Baldry): I say, first, to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) that I have no difficulty dealing with the brief from the point

[Mr. Tony Baldry]

of view of collective responsibility. Some of my hon. Friends have given the impression that some of the decisions that have been taken are capricious or arbitrary. I hope that my hon. Friends accept that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and all the other Agriculture Ministers have taken great care over the issue. Of course we have listened carefully to the representations made to us by my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), whom I congratulate on introducing this Adjournment debate. He did so very fairly and in full deference to the interests of his constituents. I fully understand his concerns.

We have, of course, looked at the matter time and again over this summer. Our decisions have, as I hope to explain to the House, been by no means capricious or arbitrary. They have been taken with great care, having regard not just to the Government's policies at the moment, but to long-standing, settled public policy and settled UK law.

The debate concerns established principles of compensation. I fully recognise that several issues such as compensation and market support have been raised, and I hope that I can distinguish them for the satisfaction of the House this morning.

The long-standing public policy on compensation is clear. There is a well-established principle in public law for paying compensation for loss of property as a result of Government action. The European convention on human rights requires the payment of compensation where property is expropriated. That principle means, simply stated, that when an individual is deprived of his property, fair compensation for that deprivation, subject to any overriding circumstances in the public interest, is properly due.

Where, under the over-30 months scheme, it has been necessary for cattle to be slaughtered, that is, in effect, the confiscation of property, and compensation flows from that action. Compulsory purchase is an example of compensation for loss of property. It has, however, also been a long-standing matter of settled public policy that no Government are under any obligation to pay compensation to a business for any loss of opportunity of carrying on that business which may arise from Parliament's properly considered legislative decisions.

Mr. Trimble: The Minister talks about compensation for loss of property. Does he accept that that principle should extend to cases where property is rendered valueless as a result of Government action, which is what has happened to the equipment purchased in this case? The Minister referred to the European convention on human rights. Will he give us an assurance that if the action taken under the first protocol is successful, the Government will implement any decision immediately?

Mr. Baldry: There is a considerable distinction in that no property has been expropriated. The case to which I referred in my intervention during the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport is relevant to this point. As the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) made clear, no one involved in the matter has made any attempt to suggest to the High Court or to any of the courts of the United Kingdom that the Government's actions have been outwith UK law. If people feel that they have a remedy elsewhere, such as the European Court of Human Rights, they must investigate that remedy. It would be hypothetical to suggest what may or may not happen.

Mr. Batiste: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Baldry: I will not give way because there is an important principle to be made clear. I will give way to my hon. Friend if I have time later.

In this case, there has been no confiscation or expropriation of private property. What has happened is not a loss of property. We should be clear that we are talking about the loss of a business. Here the principle is clear. The Government do not compensate for loss of business. That was demonstrated clearly in the case to which my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport referred. Indeed, in many ways, the Skoal case may have been based on stronger grounds than is the head boners' case. As Lord Justice Taylor made clear in his judgment of the case in 1990:

"The applicants challenged by way of judicial review the decision of the Secretary of State for Health . . . to make the Oral Snuff (Safety) Regulations 1989. The Regulations provide that no person shall supply, offer to supply, agree to supply, expose for supply or possess for supply any oral snuff . . .

During 1984, the applicants were looking for a manufacturing and packaging base outside the United States. They discussed with the Department of Trade and Industry and the Industry Department for Scotland the possibility of setting up a factory to market these products in Scotland. They were encouraged by the Government departments to do so and were offered a Government grant by way of incentive. In the result, the applicants built a factory at East Kilbride, near Glasgow, which was opened in 1985. They received £193,357 of Government grant."

The company had been encouraged by Government grant to set up in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Key: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Baldry: I shall give way when I have finished this point.

The business was closed as a consequence of legislation. The applicants complained to the High Court that they should receive compensation because they had been encouraged to set up the business. On that specific point, Lord Justice Taylor said:

"the decision to ban the applicants' products is tantamount to a breach of contract or a breach of representation and, as such, is an abuse of power. However, a Minister cannot fetter a discretion given him under statute. Provided he acts within his statutory powers, rationally and fairly, he is entitled to change his policy."

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: I shall give way in a moment, but I wish to make my points in some order as it is important to establish the principles relating to these important matters.

In giving judgment, Lord Justice Taylor held

"that it would be absurd to suggest that some moral commitment to a single company should prevail over the national interest"

and that the company's loss of business, though consequential on legislation, did not justify a legal claim for compensation from the Government.

Mr. Key: The Meat and Livestock Commission was offering grants to the companies. My constituent's company, Touchmead, was pursuing the possibility of such a grant, but it did not work out. Surely that was a clear indication that the Government were inducing companies to borrow money and take risks in exactly the way that the Minister has described.

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend clearly did not hear me correctly. In the Skoal case, the company was given a grant to set up in business in East Kilbride. To that extent it had a better case or was at least on all fours with the case that my hon. Friend mentions. In that instance, the High Court ruled that provided the Minister acted properly, there was no cause for compensation if the business ceased to trade as a result of a decision by Parliament.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I expect that the Minister is absolutely right in the legal sense, but the arguments that have been put by hon. Members on both sides of the House go beyond that in terms of the Government's moral obligation in respect of the hardship that has been inflicted on the companies.

I appreciate that the Minister is under certain restraints in terms of Treasury budgets, but will he consider two quick suggestions? He knows that there was substantial overpayment in compensation to slaughterhouses, which has never been clawed back. I do not know whether some agreement has been made, but there may be some scope within existing budgets to redirect some money towards this sector of the industry.

Secondly, the Government stopped the marketing and processing grants scheme, which is an EU scheme. Will he reconsider that scheme, as it might provide some assistance to companies that have moved into other sectors such as pig head deboning?

Mr. Baldry: I am endeavouring to explain to the House that our decisions have been taken on long-established principles of public law. The fact that we have been unable to offer head deboners the assistance that hon. Members are urging upon us is not a matter of being moral or immoral, but of following long-established public policy and law.

That was made clear in the House yesterday by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. Perhaps I should have read the whole exchange between my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and my right hon. and learned Friend. My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives specifically asked:

"Will he take fully into account compensation for the stock of weapons and accessories that such businesses hold and for loss of trade?"

My right hon. and learned Friend made it clear that there should be a distinction between claims for compensation for loss of trade and business. He said:

"So far as I am aware there is no precedent for such claims and I would arouse false hopes and expectations if I were to give my right hon. and hon. Friends any comfort on that point."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. 182.]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The Minister is not prepared to set a precedent on loss of trade, and we all understand that. Although there might be a moral argument for compensation, it is not necessarily being sought at the moment. In compliance with the regulations, businesses have spent money on equipment that has been rendered totally useless by a further regulation. Can the Minister not compensate those businesses purely for property that they bought to comply with the regulation and is now of absolutely no use to them? If he has to cover himself by confiscating it, he should do just that, but there should be some compensation.

Mr. Baldry: We have not been uninterested in the representations that have been made to us by my hon. Friends the Members for Gosport and for Salisbury, among others.

On at least two occasions we have taken counsel's opinion to see whether we can provide further help to cattle head deboners under established law. Contrary to what some people think, Ministers do not have powers capriciously and freely to dish out public money. They have to have some legal authority to do so. When we took counsel's advice, we thoroughly reassessed the case for a change of public policy on supporting deboners, following the meetings that my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport had with my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary. We then sought further advice from leading counsel in the field. Of course we considered the matter carefully.

Counsel's opinion was that, having regard to established law and public policy, the cattle head deboners were not entitled under domestic law to compensation for the loss of their business resulting from the decision to classify the whole cattle head as specified bovine material.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): As there is all-party support on the matter, surely the solution is perfectly simple. Blow the QCs—we should bring in a perfectly simple Bill that would be backed by both sides of the House.

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend, who I suspect may have supported the Government last night—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: No.

Mr. Baldry: I am sad that we did not have her support, but she will have recognised that, in a number of instances, such as with firearms, companies go out of business as a consequence of certain Acts of Parliament. This is another such instance. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin), whose contribution to the debate was to make gratuitously offensive comments about my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, scorns. Of course there is a precedent. As a consequence of the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, certain companies will go out of business. Last night, I heard no Labour Member urge that those companies should receive compensation for their loss of business. Clearly the Opposition pick and choose what they consider to be easy issues to attract public sympathy.

Mr. Michael J. Martin *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman, who makes gratuitously offensive comments.

Ministers have to ensure some consistency in public policy, and we shall do that. The value of the cattle deboning industry has been assessed at some £11 million. We have provided support and assistance to deboners because some cattle head deboners, as cutting plants, have benefited from the beef stock transfer scheme under which the intervention board has purchased unsaleable stock at 65 per cent. of the pre-crisis market price. Cattle head deboners have, therefore, benefited to the tune of some £6.7 million under that scheme.

Out of the total value of the business of £11 million, cattle head deboners have received £6.7 million, and the company that my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport mentioned has received more than £100,000 under that scheme. It was also open to the cattle head deboners to apply for unsaleable stock to be taken off their hands under the separate disposal scheme that we introduced for downstream sectors. I appreciate that those who have companies wish the Government would come up with the money, but hon. Members have not addressed today the long-established principle of United Kingdom law that no Government, at any time or in any circumstances, in any way, have paid compensation for the loss of a business following a legitimate decision of the House.

Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema

11 am

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I know that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, know this subject inside out, because you were at the forefront of a campaign in the past few years to have the disease prescribed. That campaign came to fruition when the disease was prescribed on 13 September 1993. Today's debate is about the callous and uncaring way in which the Government have treated former miners by failing to act on the recommendations that have come from the review carried out by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council of the prescription test for deciding chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

The Secretary of State for Social Security has had a copy of the recommendations on his desk since February this year—some three months before it was officially published in May 1996. In the mean time, many miners who would probably have been able to succeed with a claim under the recommendations of the review have, sadly, passed on.

Last week, I took the opportunity to check with Centris, the company that now manages the mineworkers' pension scheme, to find out how many miners in receipt of an occupational pension had died since April 1996. I used the criterion of the occupational pension because, as the Minister is aware, the qualification period to claim chronic bronchitis and emphysema is 20 years and, therefore, most of the miners who claim will be members of the mineworkers' pension scheme. Centris provided me with figures showing that 3,502 former miners had passed on since April 1996. I accept that it is not possible to say how many of them would have been made an award under the terms of the new recommendations, but it is fair to assume that a good number of them would have won through.

The House will recall that the disease was first prescribed on 13 September 1993. The prescription was made because new evidence, which was examined at the time by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council, showed that the disease was an endemic risk of coal mining. The new evidence had come from longitudinal studies that had been carried out in America and Belgium. After that new evidence has been analysed, it showed a greater incidence of the disease among coal miners than in the general population and, consequently, the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council made the recommendation that the disease should be prescribed.

The date of introduction was more than a coincidence. In my view, the Government timed it to sweeten the bitter pill of the colliery closure programme. In other words, political expediency led to the introduction of prescription. Now we find that the delay seems to be caused by public expenditure fears, which I believe to be totally unfounded.

In its first report in November 1992, the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council recommended three tests for diagnosing the disease. The Government accepted those recommendations and implemented them in full. Under the tests, an applicant must first qualify by having worked underground for 20 years. That means that we are talking about miners who had a career in coal mining, not about people who left the industry after a few years. That is a fair point. Secondly, a miner has to show that he has

X-ray evidence of dust retention or simple pneumoconiosis. Thirdly, he must demonstrate a 1 litre or more reduction on the forced expiration volume test over one second. If his lung capacity is reduced by 0.98, he is ruled out because the criteria are absolute. I have seen cases in which a man has had a 0.98 reduction in his lung capacity, yet the examining authorities have not been able to make him an award. There is a need for greater flexibility, and the review accepted that.

Many people have been turned down because of the X-ray evidence. One of the arguments in the early days was about whether the X-rays were of the International Labour Organisation type. We got over that problem and the X-rays now conform to the ILO type, but many injustices still occur. I shall give an example to show the Minister what is happening. In my constituency live three brothers who spent their whole working lives in the industry. The Selwood brothers are aged between 79 and 83. The brother who is 79, Harry Selwood, has 100 per cent. pneumoconiosis. The other two brothers have no pneumoconiosis, but they are racked with chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Because they have been unable to show on their X-rays evidence of dust retention, the other two brothers cannot receive a payment for the disease.

Such examples led the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council to carry out the review. It had soon become evident that the prescription test, as originally introduced, was unfair. The number of applicants and those receiving awards did not come anywhere near the figure that the Government predicted. At the time, the Government predicted that there would be 80,000 to 90,000 applicants.

In fact, the bulk of the applications and awards were made in the first year. I can say that because I have made comparisons between parliamentary answers. For example, on 27 October 1994, in answer to a parliamentary question, it was revealed that between September 1993 and September 1994 a total of 43,827 applications had been received. Of those, 40,338 had been processed and just 4,469 awards had been made. Two years on, according to a parliamentary answer given on Monday this week, by 30 September 1996 a total of 48,778 claims had been received and 5,352 awards had been made. The bulk of the applications and awards have been made and, in the past two years, only about 5,000 new applications have been received.

The number of awards is absurdly low and that has led to the prescription test being challenged by such people as Mr. Peake of Pontefract general infirmary and Mr. Howard of the Hallamshire hospital in Sheffield, two consultants who deal daily with miners suffering from the disease. It also resulted in a regionally based media campaign that included, for example, the *Barnsley Chronicle*, the *Yorkshire Post*, the *South Wales Echo* and the *Nottingham Evening Post* as well as regional television and radio. As a result of that campaign, the IIAC eventually decided to conduct a review. It started that review on 16 January 1995.

The council reported to the Secretary of State in February 1996. In the review, which was published in May 1996, the council recommended to the Government that the X-rays should be dropped from the prescription test altogether because there was clearly no connection between pneumoconiosis and chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Therefore, to call for X-ray evidence of simple pneumoconiosis did not address the problem. The council considered that the FEV1 test should be amended, but that the 20 years underground qualification should remain.

In the final paragraph of his letter to the Secretary of State published at the front of the report, the chairman of the IIAC said:

> "The Council understands that these recommendations may lead to a large number of previously unsuccessful claims being reconsidered and may therefore be relatively costly to implement. Nevertheless the strength of new scientific evidence published since our 1992 report makes it necessary for us to recommend a revision of the terms of prescription. We believe it should not be necessary to review the terms of prescription for the foreseeable future unless there is evidence that levels of exposure to respirable dust in coal mines are increasing."

In other words, the chairman recognised that the prescription test set out in the original report of 1992 was flawed. It is appalling that the Government have so far failed to act on the IIAC review. One gets the impression that interference by the Treasury is to blame for this unjustifiable delay. Perhaps the Minister could shed some light on that.

I put it to the Minister that even if the total number of awards is doubled, the costs are easily manageable. It will not cost the Treasury one penny, as I shall show in a moment. I say that because currently 5,352 awards have been made. The average assessment is 55 per cent. The pension payable for that degree of disability is £54.72 per week. If my mathematics are correct, that works out at less than £15 million a year for the pension element. Administration costs would, of course, have to be added. So if as a result of the new criteria the number of applicants doubled to 10,700, the cost of the pension element would be about £30 million. As I say, administration costs would have to be added. The Minister may say that one of the reasons for the delay is the administration that is required to deal with large numbers of applicants.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Has my hon. Friend seen a parliamentary answer from the Minister only last week which suggested a cost of £20 million in the first year, with £5 million administration costs? Does he agree that that is a small sum in the relative scale of things?

Mr. Clapham: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I have seen that parliamentary reply. It suggests that the costs of introducing the new criteria set out in the review are manageable.

I said that changing the criteria would not cost the Treasury a penny because the awards could be paid for out of the £320 million that has already gone into the Treasury's coffers from the sale of British Coal's land. By anyone's reckoning, that is money that should come back to mining communities. If that source of financing cannot be tapped, the awards could be financed from half the annual surpluses that the Government rip off from the mineworkers' pension scheme. As the people whom we are talking about are elderly, clearly the cost will diminish year on year. Therefore, that £320 million could well pay for the scheme into the future.

It is an appalling indictment of the Government that they have sat on the IIAC recommendations for nine months. In the mean time, literally hundreds of former coal miners have died of the dust and have been unable to make a claim. Neither they nor their families, who in

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many instances cared for and nursed them, have a chance of claiming benefit for their suffering. It is estimated that in the Barnsley borough 12 per cent. of the population are carers and that most of the people for whom they care are relatives who previously worked in the mining industry.

I hope that the Minister can tell us that the recommendations will be implemented immediately and that they will be retrospectively applied in view of the delay that has been caused by the Government.

11.16 am

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on securing the opportunity to debate this matter. As soon as the debate appeared on the Order Paper, I wrote to Madam Speaker asking for the opportunity to take part. This is a significant issue which involves a substantial number of my constituents as well as others in west and north Yorkshire. My colleague represents south Yorkshire and I endorse all his remarks because they apply to miners in west and north Yorkshire.

As several hon. Members want to speak, I shall keep my comments brief. I wish to put a number of questions to the Minister. If he cannot respond to them this morning, they will be on record and I hope that he will follow them up after the debate. The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council report was presented to the Secretary of State in February this year and was made public in May. It recommended two main amendments. The first was that the forced expiration volume in one second test—the FEV1 test—should be retained but amended to allow underground workers who have small lung volume to be judged according to their frame. The second was that the need for radiographic evidence of coal dust retention be removed from prescription.

Since the report was published, I have received numerous inquiries from former mineworkers in my constituency. They asked how and when the report would be implemented. I wrote to the Secretary of State giving the names of some of the individuals who had been pressing me. The response has been negative. I should like the Minister to deal with a number of issues. First, when will the recommendations be implemented? That is what everyone wants to know. If he can give some indication today, that will be a step in the right direction. Secondly, will claimants denied benefits because they failed either the FEV or the X-ray test, or both, be granted benefit automatically, or will they have to reapply when the Secretary of State agrees to implement the recommendations?

Thirdly, will the widow or any relatives be able to make a posthumous claim because their husband or father failed the FEV and X-ray tests, but has since died? Will claimants who have satisfied the FEV test but have been denied benefit because they failed the X-ray test be automatically assessed? Will any benefits due to them be paid back to the date of their previous claim, or to September 1993 if the claim was submitted within the original time limit? A substantial number of people applied in September 1993, but it took three or four months before some qualified for the examination. If we are to be fair to them, they should receive compensation from September 1993. Will that apply to posthumous claims made on behalf of a miner's family? Will those claims go back to 1993?

We must also consider surface workers. Those of us who have worked in the mining industry are aware of miners who worked underground for perhaps 15 or 18 years, but then had to work on the surface in dusty conditions. Those men have been denied the opportunity of applying for benefit, and that is an injustice. The Minister must reconsider, because a substantial number of people who should be claiming benefit are involved.

We are told that 3,502 former mineworkers in receipt of an occupational pension have died since the report was presented to the Secretary of State. How many of those who claimed benefit were turned down because they failed the X-ray test? It would be easy to identify them. Since the Secretary of State received the report, how many appeals have been lodged on the basis that the X-ray showed no dust on the lung? The Secretary of State is sitting on a recommendation from the advisory council while people are being refused benefit because there is nothing on their X-ray. Those applicants are appealing, but that test will not now apply. How much will that cost the Department of Social Security? We have heard that there is a lack of resources to pay the benefit, but the Secretary of State's refusal to act on the recommendation is costing the Government money. However, the people who will pay most are the retired miners.

How many people have failed because of the FEV test? How many appeals have been lodged? If the Secretary of State implemented the recommendations of the report, it would solve many of the problems and many miners would not need to appeal against their assessment. We are also aware of people who—having been turned down because the X-ray did not show them to be suffering from category 1 dust—have died shortly after the X-ray and been found to have been suffering from category 3 dust, which causes pneumoconiosis. But because the regulations say that the X-ray should show category 1 dust, they have not qualified for benefit. The regulations are flawed, as the case now being pursued through the courts will reveal. In such cases, no payment has been made to the family or to the widow.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): My hon. Friend will be aware that two years or more ago, some of us—including, I think, my hon. Friend—submitted evidence to the Minister that the quality and nature of the X-ray film being used did not allow a proper diagnosis to be made.

Mr. William O'Brien: That is a substantial point that we made in our evidence to the Government. A significant amount of evidence shows beyond any shadow of a doubt that an injustice is being done to many former miners.

In the 1950s, I worked at a colliery where 2,500 miners worked underground, and some 20,000 miners were working in the area at that time. Those were the numbers in the industry in the early 1950s, and—while other hon. Members will be representing some of them—few of those miners are left because they have been racked by industrial illness and injury. But for the few who remain, the recommendations must be applied immediately. Will the Minister address the points of concern that I have raised? If he cannot answer them this morning, will he ensure that we receive written answers so that people can be made aware of the Minister's response to the concerns of former miners?

11.26 am

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): I congratulate and thank my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on obtaining this debate. I think that I am qualified to take part as I am an ex-miner and for 12 years was general secretary of the Scottish area of the National Union of Mineworkers. I also represent a mining constituency, where many people suffer from the diseases in question.

As only 5 to 6 per cent. of Scottish claimants were successful in obtaining a pension under chronic bronchitis and emphysema prescribed disease D12, I was delighted to hear that the Government's advisory committee had agreed to recommend changes in the qualifying method. For example, the recommendation to drop category 1, pneumoconiosis, was a breakthrough. However, the Minister has still not embraced that change, although he received the recommendations in February and we are now in November. Are the Government waiting for most of the claimants to die so as to save the Exchequer money? As the economist John Maynard Keynes once said,

"In the long run, we are all dead."

The Minister wrote to me in response to a letter that I had sent on behalf of the family of the late Joe Knox of Bonnyrigg, who died prematurely of bronchitis and emphysema, but was disqualified under the current scheme. The Minister's reply made the excuse that he did not have time to analyse the findings of his advisers, but he made it clear—as he has done to my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien)—that no retrospective claims would be accepted. We cannot repay families for the loss of a relative's life or health, but a pension or lump sum might show that society actually cared in some small way for the sacrifice that they made. Many miners' families are extremely bitter, and they blame the Government for the way in which the situation has been handled.

I wonder how the Minister can sleep at night, knowing that he is a party to such a grievous injustice. But it is never too late: even Ebenezer Scrooge had a dramatic change of heart. I appeal to the Minister in the run-up to Christmas to change his attitude and shed some ray of hope on those affected in mining communities and particularly in my constituency. I hope that he will reconsider the policy of no retrospection and implement the recommendations immediately.

11.29 am

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke–on–Trent, North): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on securing this debate.

I ask the Minister to note how many hon. Members signed the early-day motion and also consider all the correspondence. The issue matters a great deal, especially to hon. Members who represent coal mining areas. We have heard a great deal in the past 24 hours about how the House must determine issues of health and safety at work and deal with matters which, according to the Government, affect this country. In mining areas, nothing matters more than ensuring that those who have worked underground and have paid with their health get proper compensation for chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

Concern is not confined to ex-miners and their families; the British public realise how much suffering and hardship has been endured. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone spoke earlier about the newspaper campaigns, especially in Yorkshire, and in my area of north Staffordshire the *Evening Sentinel* is backing the cause. We need a proper answer from the Minister today. If we do not get it, we can turn the matter into a public campaign throughout the country, and especially in mining areas.

We must give ex-miners an assurance that they need not live in fear of the cold this winter. In north Staffordshire, about 90 per cent. of applicants for the benefit have been turned down. I spoke to the leader of the National Union of Mineworkers this morning and he told me that a huge number of men had died since the benefit was introduced in 1993. We cannot afford to let down those who are left and their families.

The compensation is not large, ranging between a maximum of £90 and £20, but for the men and their families it represents the ability to keep warm as we approach the winter months. We cannot afford to delay action for another 12 months. I have read the recommendations carefully and I have written regularly to the Minister. I recognise that the Government should have due time to consider the various recommendations, but how long must we wait for them to say whether they intend to implement them?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone said, it is right to do away with the X-rays and we should no longer count sickness and absence in the 20-year period that is being assessed. There should also be changes in the criteria for the lung function assessment. As new mining techniques mean that miners could be at risk from a more concentrated exposure to coal dust, the matter should be kept under review.

Will the Minister give us an absolute assurance about how much money is involved, how many people in his Department are working on the issue, and whether he has the staff resources to ensure that the recommendations can be implemented in full? Will he ensure that when he implements the proposals—as I hope that he will, not least because of public pressure—there will be proper arrangements so that an administrative blunder cannot create a three or four-year delay in assessment? The administrative arrangements must be in place, especially in coal mining or ex-coal mining areas, to ensure that the men who need the benefit and apply for it can be paid quickly.

Only last week I received a letter from a constituent in Bradeley village who said that she had followed carefully the campaign in the House of Commons and that, although it was too late for her husband, who had died, we should do what we could to get the Government to introduce the benefit in full and without further delay, on behalf of all the men who have died and all the wives and families caring for men who are ill. That is what we want from the Minister today.

11.36 am

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It is important to recognise that my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) has been slogging away on this campaign for ages; others have been involved—I and other hon. Members went to present

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evidence at the Trades Union Congress, for instance—but my hon. Friend has been in the front row for a long time, and he is to be congratulated on his efforts.

The issue could have been settled relatively easily because, generally speaking, the Government are supposed to take on board what the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council—a so-called independent body, staffed by people with medical expertise—says about a case; although the council is a quango, I do not think that it has yet been stuffed with Tories. If the recommendations had come from the City of London, the Government would have implemented them within a couple of weeks and we might have had a statement from the appropriate Minister, but this is different: it is about miners and mining communities in areas of Britain where the Tories by and large have no political influence.

I put it to the Minister and to the Secretary of State, who is not here today, that I know what their game is: they think that miners vote Labour so they need not bother about them. That was their attitude when they shut the last batch of 31 pits. We are talking about communities that have been ravaged by the Government, especially in the years since the miners' strike. There are areas of mass unemployment: male unemployment is as high as 50 per cent. in some of the coalfield villages, despite the fiddled figures that the Tories trot out every day—we had another lot today. We are talking about real poverty.

Groups of miners, wealth creators who worked, in some cases, for 40 or 50 years, who dug the coal during the war and whenever it was necessary, are coughing their lungs up, and what thanks to they get? They are told that they can have an X-ray and an FEV test, that they have to have worked for 20 years and that if they were dragged out of the pit on their hands and knees and had to work on the surface for the last few years they would not qualify. There were about 10 different hurdles for people to jump. What happens? As my hon. Friend said, only 10 or 11 per cent. succeed. Yesterday, at Social Security Question Time, we heard about some tribunals where 50 per cent. of applications are successful, so 10 or 11 per cent. is a paltry amount.

You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have also been involved in this matter, probably from the beginning, in an attempt to put the matter on the statute book, so this could be described as an all-party affair, although it does not extend as far as the Conservative Benches.

What does the Minister have against miners and their communities? We are talking about a relatively small amount of money. The Government gave away the pits to Budge for a song; yet they cannot find this small amount of money to legislate on the recommendations of a body whose recommendations are usually accepted by Governments.

I remember only too well my efforts during the 1974-79 Labour Government to have a chemical factory disease prescribed. Some of my hon. Friends will remember that, because there are not many prescribed industrial diseases. When such a measure goes on the statute book, it is supposed to be implemented. My right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), who was in the Department of Social Security at the time, had that recommendation accepted within a short space of time. Yet the present lousy, rotten Government have been sitting on this matter for almost the whole of this year because they cannot stand miners who had the guts to stand up against this paltry Government on a number of occasions.

What is bugging the Government? This is not a Common Market directive. When we have a directive such as the one that we had from the Common Market yesterday giving workers three weeks holiday and a 48-hour week, one can understand that the Government have to give way to the Euro-sceptics in their party. But this is not a Common Market directive—it is British through and through—so why can the Government not implement it?

Just think about those miners walking along the streets of the pit villages, struggling from lamp post to lamp post. They walk 25 yards, then they grab at the nearest fence, coughing, their heads bent low. Then along comes Mr. Deputy Speaker and people such as my hon. Friends and they manage to convince the powers that be that there should be chronic bronchitis and emphysema legislation. It took years; then, when it was introduced, the Government emaciated it. Many thought that after 40 or 50 years they would see some rainbow, a little extra money to buy all the things that they had never been able to buy, but they finish up with this tinpot legislation.

Some of us decide to try to make things better and we make promises. We tell people that we will take the matter to an independent body. We do so, and that body goes along with many of our proposals. Yet this stinking Government do not have the guts to implement the recommendations. The Government should get off their knees and give some hope to people who have put more into society than any of those who sit on the Conservative Benches.

11.42 am

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I shall be brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a number of my hon. Friends wish to join in. I echo the reference made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) to yourself. You will recall that I was one of the sponsors of the several Bills that you presented in an effort to achieve justice in this matter of coalfield concern.

On Sunday morning last, with a number of other people from my local community, wreaths were laid at the memorial to the men of Manvers Main colliery who were killed in the world wars. In the first world war, more than 200 men from that one pit died. More than 40 of them gained medals for gallantry, including the Victoria cross. Their grandsons and great nephews are suffering from these industrial diseases now. Yet they were labelled by the Government as the enemy within.

My hon. Friend referred to the substantial contributions made by people from the coalfields, yet they have not been treated fairly. In response to your private Member's Bills, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government eventually gave way and allowed a scheme. Then they drew up qualifications and regulations which meant that only a tiny proportion of the men who applied would succeed. Yet their neighbours, people without political experience or qualification, knew well that those men were coughing and would die far earlier than they otherwise would have done.

While the Government have hedged, prevaricated and delayed, thousands have died. As my hon. Friends the Members for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) and for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) have said, the numbers are shrinking and the cost will diminish rapidly. The Government have taken a great deal of money out of the coalfields as a result of privatisation; we ask that a little of that money is put back into the areas where it was created.

11.45 am

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): I hope that the Minister has heard the voices from coalfield communities all over the country—Scotland, Wales and the midlands—and that he recognises the strength of feeling there. He knows of the campaign to obtain the benefit in the first place. We need to congratulate you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on that. Then there was the campaign to have the benefit reviewed because it was not meeting the needs of those involved.

The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council reported in February. It is now nine months on and the clock is ticking for many of those miners. They have given their health and lives to bring comfort and warmth to the nation. It is time for the Minister to make an announcement. Nine months is a long time in anyone's reckoning. For those who are ill and in the twilight of their days, it is important that we have an announcement now.

I am sure that the Minister is aware of the campaign by the *Nottingham Evening Post*, in which he has been quoted. Back in June, the Secretary of State told that paper that the recommendations would be implemented. If he can tell the *Nottingham Evening Post* in June that things will be good for former miners, why cannot an announcement be made here today in Parliament during this important debate?

Perhaps it has something to do with the cost. I am grateful for the parliamentary answer that the Minister gave me only last week, telling me that according to his calculations the cost in the first year would be £20 million with £5 million administrative costs. As many of my hon. Friends have pointed out, that cost will decline in future years as the group of beneficiaries gets smaller.

The coalfields have contributed to Britain's wealth, but the communities there have had a tough time. They believe that the Government have turned their back on them and walked away. They have buried the coal industry, but they must not bury those miners who are chronically crippled and ill without giving them the benefit of some extra help.

The Budget is due in a fortnight's time. If the Minister cannot make an announcement today, will he ensure that a decision is made as part of the Budget process? There may well be discussions, debates and perhaps some tension between the Department of Social Security and the Treasury at this moment, but the campaign will go on. People will not walk away from this. Enough is enough. It is important to make an announcement and pay the benefit now because many of the miners, their wives and families are in an intolerable situation.

Let us have an announcement now. The Government have had the opportunity to consider the matter for nine months. We know what the cost has been. The time has come to look after those who have looked after the nation for so many years.

11.49 am

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on his campaign, not only on this issue but on many other issues relating to the mining industry. He has acted with his customary modesty, but I pay special tribute to his persistence in those matters, which is applauded by those us who represent mining communities.

Luckily, I still represent a mining community, but that is no thanks to this Government. It is thanks to the effort of the miners themselves—not to the Deputy Prime Minister, who was responsible for the privatisation programme and who made many promises during the passage of that legislation, most of which have been broken. Indeed, on 27 June this year, he told us that he was looking at the recommendations as a matter of urgency. I do not know what urgency means to the Deputy Prime Minister—perhaps it means working with civil servants in an attempt to commandeer them in his vain efforts to win the next general election. I can tell him now that he might as well give up and apply himself to matters of greater importance, such as this campaign.

The Minister, the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans), himself represents a south Wales constituency—it might be ungracious, but I should add that he will not do so for much longer. I am sure that, in the next general election, that seat will be reclaimed for the Labour party. The hon. Gentleman knows the situation in south Wales and the conditions in which people live. From his practice in the area, he has known for many years the suffering that those communities have endured. He knows that, all along, miners and their families have had to fight for every penny of compensation that they have ever received from the state. When I was a journalist, I fought alongside the miners in the pneumoconiosis campaign. Everyone knows how hard the miners had to fight to get just compensation for contracting that terrible disease.

I was elected in the middle of a miners' strike. In 1984, I went down a small street in Penrhiwceiber—a small mining village known to the Minister. In every other house there was a man suffering from either bronchitis and emphysema or pneumoconiosis and many of those men were using oxygen machines at that time. I went down the same street a year later and was told, "He's dead," "He's dead," "He's very ill," "He's dying." That is why it is important that the matter be dealt with urgently. Urgency must mean more to the Deputy Prime Minister than five months' delay while people wait for him to come up with a response to those proper recommendations.

The Minister has, of course, been trying to explain why the reduced earnings allowance is a just measure, but I remind him that, ever since the Social Security Act 1986 was passed, disabled people and their relatives have been penalised by this Government. This is an opportunity to put matters right. We are not asking a big favour—the sum of money involved is small—but it would make an enormous difference to those miners and their families who are suffering as a result of an industrial disease that they contracted when they were working in our mining industries.

11.53 am

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) for not having been present at the

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beginning of the debate. He has done us all a service by obtaining the debate. Like many other Opposition Members, I come from a coal mining area and have many constituents who are worried about the current position.

When, after a long campaign of which you do not need reminding, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the House decided to classify emphysema and bronchitis as an industrial disease, many of us were greatly relieved. That was followed by massive disappointment, with many of my constituents finding that the tests to get compensation were so tightly drawn that the rejection rate was well above 90 per cent. For many years, I have been dealing with the case of Mr. George Lambton who worked for 51 years in Kiveton Park colliery in my constituency. He failed the tests that were originally used to determine whether someone qualified for compensation.

When I read the report published in February this year which revealed the weaknesses in the tests, I was greatly relieved and wrote to Mr. Lambton about it. I also discussed the matter with hospital consultants who were experts on the question of hard versus soft X-rays being used to identify the disease. What intrigued and pleased me about the February report was its findings on the FEV test—that lung capacity varies according to the stature of the individual.

Mr. Lambton is a very small man. He and his general practitioner are absolutely convinced that he suffers from the disease—now classified as an industrial disease—of emphysema and bronchitis, but he has failed the FEV test. As has been made clear by the report, the main reason for his failure is probably his stature—he is only about 5 ft tall. I wrote to him about the report and said that he should reapply for compensation for emphysema and bronchitis, and he has done so. It is nearly sorted out now—he went for an X-ray and was told, "Oh, by the way, you have pneumoconiosis as well, so you should apply for that compensation, too." Mr. Lambton's lungs are clearly in a bad condition.

Mr. Lambton's appeal has not gone through yet, but if he reaches that point before the regulations are changed to correct the problems with the original assessment, he will be back to square one. That is not good enough. When a report is published that clearly shows why there was a failure rate of more than 90 per cent., action is needed. It is wrong to leave thousands of people like Mr. Lambton in this state of limbo resulting from delay in implementing a sensible recommendation that would enable them to get the compensation from the state that they deserve.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) pointed out that the Secretary of State said that the regulations would be altered. I hope that the Minister will come to the Dispatch Box to say that that will be done as soon as possible. If my constituent fails at his next attempt because the regulations have not been altered according to the recommendations, I shall tell him to reapply, and to keep going until he gets justice. The Minister should give some firm assurances about when that injustice will be put right—many thousands of people need it to be done straight away.

11.57 am

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): This has been an excellent debate and I hope that the Minister is thinking about what he is going to say. Hon. Members have spoken with great emotion and the report contained cold logic, so I sincerely hope that the Minister has come here not with fine words, but with a commitment to accept the recommendations and to proceed quickly with implementation of the proposals.

There is a profound sense of injustice, anger and disappointment throughout the coalfields of Britain, and rightly so. Communities, ex-miners, miners' families, councillors, councils, mining unions, Members of Parliament and local newspapers such as the *Nottingham Evening Post* have campaigned vigorously over the past few years for the issue to be taken seriously and resolved. I join my hon. Friends in thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) for his endeavours in this respect—he simply will not give up and that is a message that the Minister should understand. I hope that the Minister has something positive to say, but he should be under no illusion about the fact that, if he is not positive this morning, the campaign will go on and on until we achieve victory for the thousands of ex-miners up and down the country.

Emotion is important in the House and, this morning, we have heard passionate but concise speeches. These men have contributed greatly to the nation's prosperity—that is not in doubt. Many of them knew that their health was being damaged every day they went down the pit. The real tragedy is that the lives of some of those whom we hope will be beneficiaries are now ebbing away. They face the damage caused by chronic bronchitis and emphysema and that is linked to a sense of injustice and concern at the fact that they do not have enough cash in the household. That is not a situation facing the Minister, but it does face those families.

It is always useful to throw in one's own experience. My father was a mineworker for 30 years and his last trip up from the mine was on a stretcher. My grandfather worked for the private coal companies. The conditions in those mines were part of the reason for nationalisation. I have seen colleagues who have been councillors, lying in bed with an oxygen cylinder by their side. I am sure that that is not an experience shared by the Minister or those who advise him, but it provides a telling insight into the suffering that is endured by many of those ex-miners.

Of course, of itself, emotion is not enough on which to base changes to legislation or regulations. However, the emotion of this issue has been built on by the hard and compelling logic of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council. Public interest should be represented. We have the emotion, the passion and the sentiment, but more important, we have the logic of an inquiry that has delivered recommendations to the Minister.

Given that emotion and logic, Parliament must respond. That is why there is a tremendous responsibility on the Minister this morning. He cannot duck the issue. All my colleagues have put their points to him and he has the report on his desk. The Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Social Security and a host of Under-Secretaries have uttered fine words, but they have been running. The Minister cannot run any further. He is faced with the contributions made by my colleagues and the logic of the report. I hope that he will rise to the occasion.

So far, the campaign has been successful, and that success encourages everybody to believe that we will go from strength to strength. It was as a result of the

campaign started by my hon. Friends that, in 1993, the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council made emphysema and bronchitis a prescribed disease. It was through their efforts that, in January 1995 the IIAC decided to review the prescription because it was far too constrained and, as a consequence, out of 50,000 miners who had applied only a handful—5,000—got what they deserved.

The IIAC reported to the Minister earlier this year. It is worth restating that, in a technical area, the changes will make a profound difference to those seeking to obtain industrial injuries benefit. The report recommended dropping the requirement for X-ray evidence of pneumonoconiosis. It recommended keeping the 20-year rule but, importantly, making sure that it included sickness periods. It was outrageous that, initially, the 20-year period would not have included the sickness periods. The report recommended keeping the FEV test, amending it to allow for workers with small lung volumes. That seems to be elementary common sense and one wonders why it was not included in the first set of recommendations. One does not have to be a medical expert to realise that implementing those changes would allow a larger number of people to get the justice that they deserve.

The case has been made and that is not the basis for this debate. It is important to look at some of the comments that have been made from the Prime Minister through to the Under-Secretaries. To come right up to date, when visiting Nottingham a few days ago, the Prime Minister said that the matter was still being considered. The headline in the *Nottingham Evening Post* said, "Prime Minister, John Major, visiting Nottingham today, is still refusing to guarantee extra cash help for crippled ex-miners."

On 27 June—this has already been quoted—the Deputy Prime Minister told my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone that he would view the matter with urgency. What does "urgency" mean? The report has been on the Minister's desk since February and it was published in May. The Prime Minister spoke in November, the Deputy Prime Minister spoke in June and we have had many fine words from other Ministers. I am pleased to see in the House the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott), because during his time as a Minister he contributed to some of the more positive aspects of the debate.

Why the inactivity? What is the problem in a budget that spends £90 billion of taxpayers' money and which will rise in 1998-99 to £101 billion? This is the first group of Ministers to look forward to that level of budget, but they will see a Labour Government use it more effectively. I want to ask the Minister some direct questions.

The Minister has seen the report and has had expert advice. He knows of the hardship and misery that the delays are causing to people in the coalfield communities in Britain. Why the delay? I hope that he will give us the reasons. Although we have had some comments on the recommendations in the report, the Government have not overwhelmingly embraced its findings and recommendations. The Minister—I see him raising his eyebrows—may suggest that he has done that, but the comments were not specific enough for us to be reassured that, at the heart of Government, the scientific report has been accepted. I want to find out whether the recommendations have been fully accepted. When will the Government implement the changes? My hon. Friends have already asked whether this is a battle between the Department of Social Security and the Treasury—it often is. We have not found out whether the Department of Social Security is whole-heartedly pursuing the Treasury—if it is the Treasury that is blocking this. Those are important questions.

The other issue which underpins the attack that we are making this morning goes back to the initial comments. This is supposed to be a Parliament for all the people of the United Kingdom. It is supposed to be a Parliament that looks at evidence impartially, weighs it up and makes recommendations. If I were an ex-miner in Nottingham, Barnsley or any other part of Britain and I was struggling for breath in the way described by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)—I have seen such people walking along the streets—I would wonder what sort of Parliament this is. The partiality of this Parliament is often a disgrace.

If the debate is reported, it means that the public will have an opportunity to know about this excellent debate and the contributions made by my colleagues. Also, the Minister has an opportunity to become a superstar in the mining communities. That is not an opportunity that will fall to him very often. He has the chance to become a hero in the working-class communities of Britain. That must be a challenge for any Tory Minister.

I have been generous and have tried to reflect the excellent case that has been made by my colleagues. I hope that the Minister will say, "Yes, yes, yes," to all the questions we ask so that we can tell our constituents that this Parliament works for them and for Britain and that, on this serious issue, there was a consensus which paid dividends and people got their just reward.

12.9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on securing the debate, and I am grateful to him for that. I have been asked in a number of different ways by everyone who spoke, including the shadow spokesman, the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish), whether I will make an announcement. I shall begin by making my answer to that question clear. I am not able to make an announcement this morning. I did not leave that statement to the end of my speech, because I knew that hon. Members wanted to know my answer now. Let me explain where we have got to, and then I will reply to the debate in some detail.

I raised an eyebrow when the scientific medical aspects of the IIAC report were mentioned. The Government accept those conclusions: that is an important matter. I also make it clear that an announcement will be made shortly, but I cannot go into detail about what stage those matters have reached. I stress that the Government are attending to the matter, and an announcement will be made shortly. I cannot go further than that. I have no doubt that hon. Members will press me to do so, but that is my position.

Ms Walley: In view of what the Minister has just said, will he tell us what is holding up the announcement? Where is the blockage? Is it in the Treasury? Will he share

[Ms Walley]

that information with us? We want to know why, having had sufficient notice, he is unable to make an announcement today.

Mr. Evans: It is tempting to answer the hon. Member for Stoke–on–Trent, North (Ms Walley), and it may be simpler for me to do so, but she will appreciate that I cannot. The matter is being attended to, and an announcement will be made shortly.

Mr. Tipping *rose—*

Mr. Hardy *rose—*

Mr. Evans: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone first, because he secured the debate and I think that he rose slightly more quickly than the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy). *[Interruption.]* I am so sorry, it is the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping).

Mr. Tipping: Will the Minister remind the House that on the day after the Budget it is normal practice for the Secretary of State for Social Security to make an announcement? By my reckoning, that day of judgment will be 27 November. My hon. Friends may be relaxed and mild now—the Minister heard my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)—but he should reflect on that and make it a red letter day in his diary.

Mr. Evans: I do not think that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) could be so described this morning: he made a powerful speech. I hear what the hon. Member for Sherwood says, and I have made it clear that an announcement will be made shortly. [HON. MEMBERS: "When is shortly?"] That means shortly shortly, within reasonable shortness. Other than that I cannot qualify shortly in a helpful way, and beyond that I cannot and will not go.

Mr. Hardy: A long time ago, when a better Government were in office, I brought to the House's attention the case of a constituent who was suffering from those diseases. He depended on oxygen and could not leave his house because he had to be by the side of a large oxygen cylinder. I asked the then Government to allow portable oxygen cylinders to be provided by the national health service. They agreed, and within an astonishingly short time people such as my constituent were able to go to the local club, go for a walk to see their son's allotment and accompany their wives to the local shop, because they could carry a portable cylinder and were free. They were liberated by a caring Government who acted with expedition, whereas this lot have been sitting on this matter for years.

Mr. Clapham *rose—*

Mr. Evans: I think that I am obliged to answer the hon. Gentleman's question first. I hear the point that he makes. It concerns a wider issue, but I understand why he makes it.

Mr. Clapham: Will the announcement that is likely to be made in the near future be made orally to the House, and not in the form of a written answer to a question?

Mr. Evans: I cannot answer that, but I can assure the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone that it will be made in whatever is the appropriate conventional fashion.

I shall deal with the specific points that hon. Members have raised, because it is important that I go through them one by one. The hon. Member for Sherwood referred to my parliamentary answer on the cost, which will be £20 million plus £5 million for administration. I appreciate the points made about property sales and the sums that, it is said, should be paid back to the mining communities. For nearly 200 years, there has been a consolidated fund. Hon. Members must appreciate that, whatever their merits, the proposals involve a public expenditure commitment, which must be accounted for in the usual way.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish), who seemed in one breath to be satisfied with the largeness of the social security budget, said that if he were in office he would apply it more appropriately. He must explain what allowance would be made if that were done.

The hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) asked me several specific questions about matters that go beyond the area that we are discussing today. I warn him that some of his observations about retrospection go further than what any Government have done in the past in connection with this scheme. I shall read his speech carefully in *Hansard*, and I shall do my best to answer his questions. I may be able to answer them more fully at the time of the announcement. I have noted the points that he made, and I shall examine them carefully.

Mr. William O'Brien: I prefaced my remarks by saying that I thought that the Minister would not be able to answer my questions, but that it would be helpful if he could answer them in writing. I am concerned about what the Minister just said about retrospection going beyond what we could expect. Does he accept that the regulations are deeply flawed? They require that dust retention should show up on the X-ray, but post-mortems reveal a vast discrepancy in that area. In my opinion, retrospection is understandable and fair, and I hope that the Minister will give it fair consideration.

Mr. Evans: As I understand it, the scientific evidence presented by IIAC is correct. The difficulty with the X-ray test is that what shows up on the X-ray depends in part on the carbon content of coal. Anthracite and best Welsh steam-coal produce more visible signs in X-rays than do other types of coal. That is the scientific argument presented by IIAC, and, as I said, we accept that.

The difficulty with retrospection—I put this in general terms—is the way in which the scheme has operated since 1946. Scientific knowledge develops. The purpose of IIAC is to monitor the scientific argument as it develops and extends. Governments have traditionally taken the view that when the scientific evidence, as assessed and reported on by IIAC, meets the statutory test of the scheme—which has been in place since 1946—the change is made for future cases. That happened in 1993 in respect of this issue.

I put in a word of caution, because the hon. Member for Normanton, for understandable reasons, is trying to press me to go further than any Government have gone before. I shall consider the point, and I shall try to reply to him as best as I can immediately, and subsequently when the announcement is made.

Mr. McLeish: I wish to reinforce the point. Between 1993 and now, a significant number of cases have come

before the Department. Will the Minister reassure me that if the changes are accepted and implemented, the case load from 1993 to 1996 will be eligible for reconsideration in an attempt retrospectively to bring justice to those people?

Mr. Evans: That would involve further expense, over and above the figures that we quoted earlier. I shall consider all matters, including that one, before the announcement is made. However, the scheme has not traditionally been operated in that way. The purpose of IIAC is to advise the Government and Parliament on the evolving state of the scientific evidence. The point at which, in IIAC's judgment, the two criteria have been met is the point at which, traditionally, we respond to IIAC.

Mr. McLeish: I am grateful for the candidness of the Minister's responses. Would he be amenable to further representations being made in the next few days about the question of retrospection? It is important to my hon. Friends. I merely ask the Minister to acknowledge its importance, and to tell us whether he would be happy to obtain further evidence before the announcement is made—shortly, or shortly shortly.

Mr. Evans: I hope that "shortly" means fairly shortly. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is, of course, yes. I hope that there was no misunderstanding in the summer. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone on 23 July, inviting him to meet Ministers with members of the miners' group. That meeting has not taken place for some reason, but I shall be delighted to meet any members of the group.

Mr. Clapham: We want to see the Minister.

Mr. Evans: When people say that to me, I know full well that it will happen. Anyway, if any hon. Members wish to make further representations, I shall be delighted to listen.

Mr. Eric Clarke: I raised the question of retrospection because a letter that I received suggested that there was to be no retrospection. Is the Minister now opening the door to discussion about the matter? In the example that I gave, someone died of the disease.

Mr. Evans: The fact that I am always prepared to listen to an argument should not lead to the supposition that I necessarily accede to that argument. As I made clear to the hon. Member for Normanton, what is being demanded goes further than any Government have traditionally gone under this scheme. Nevertheless, if anyone wants to put a particular case to me, I am prepared to listen to it carefully. I will have it assessed carefully, and I will have it costed carefully. I give this warning, however: although I am prepared to listen, we are being asked to go much further than the scheme has previously gone.

I should make it clear to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North that there is an issue of administration. I was asked specifically how long the arrangements would take to implement were we to make such an announcement. The 1993 scheme took five and a half months to implement, and serious questions of administration are involved in any such implementation; but the Government are attending to all matters.

I shall be kinder to the hon. Member for Bolsover than he was to me. IIAC is, of course, a quango, but I think that even the hon. Gentleman will agree that, if there is such a thing as a quango, it is the best of all possible quangos. It is an expert body: it contains medical experts of the highest repute, as well as representatives of both the TUC and the CBI.

The hon. Member for Sherwood mentioned the *Nottingham Evening Post* interview with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I regret to say that that newspaper read rather more into off-the-cuff remarks than was justified, although I appreciate that the interview excited considerable interest in Nottinghamshire at the time.

Criticisms have been made of the 1993 scheme, quite apart from those addressed by IIAC. The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) seemed to be saying that in 1993 we had somehow frustrated everyone's intentions by devising a scheme that was tighter than the one for which they were campaigning. As I understand the position, we simply implemented what IIAC then recommended.

Having—I hope—dealt with most of the points that have been made, I will not reintroduce a discussion with the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on reduced earnings allowance, or on any of the other matters that she mentioned. The debate focuses, very properly, on a particular matter.

Mrs. Clwyd: It is an important issue.

Mr. Evans: I know that it is important, but it is separate and distinct from what we have been discussing today.

It is important to define the role of IIAC, and the conditions that must be satisfied before a disease may be prescribed. That will explain why the terms of the prescription of chronic bronchitis and emphysema were drawn up in the way that they were in 1993, why the council reviewed the criteria this year and why it reached the conclusions and made the recommendations contained in its report.

No doubt everyone will be encouraged by the fact that the opinions expressed in both the 1992 and the 1996 IIAC reports on the subject were unanimous: there was agreement among all representatives on the body, including the medical experts.

Industrial injuries disablement benefit is payable for disablement resulting from industrial accidents and from certain diseases that are prescribed. As I said earlier, the legal basis for prescription has remained unchanged since the scheme was introduced in its modern form in 1946—although I appreciate that that reformed the 1897 scheme. The statutory provision is contained in section 108 of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992, which states:

"A disease or injury may be prescribed in relation to any employed earners if the Secretary of State is satisfied that—

(a) it ought to be treated, having regard to its causes and incidence and any other relevant considerations, as a risk of their occupations and not as a risk common to all persons; and

(b) it is such that, in the absence of special circumstances, the attribution of particular cases to the nature of the employment can be established or presumed with reasonable certainty."

Mr. William O'Brien: When my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Sir G. Lofthouse)—now Deputy Speaker—introduced his Bill, he had in mind the regulations to which the Minister referred. Although the Bill was accepted, my hon. Friend's experience in the mining industry—which was included in it—was not taken into consideration by the review body. We are asking for the changes to be implemented without further delay, and for other matters that we have mentioned today to be taken into account. I hope that the Minister will consider all the facts that have been presented, because further changes must be made.

Mr. Evans: I hear that argument, and will give careful consideration to what it involves.

The statutory test is important. It is of fairly long standing, having existed throughout my lifetime. It has worked so far, although I appreciate that whether it is too strict, and whether it is drafted in quite the right way, are matters of argument.

This is a slightly unusual scheme. It is a compensation scheme, not a benefit scheme. It is distinct from, for instance, the arrangements for disability and incapacity benefits. It is a scheme of compensation—in the tradition of workmen's compensation that goes back to 1897—which is not based on proof of fault: it is a tax-free, no-fault compensation scheme. Therefore, it requires criteria that are clear and well established: no doubt that is why they have remained in their present state for a long time.

Mr. Clapham: The payment of compensation is normally connected with the fact that someone has been subjected to an unnecessary risk. Here we are talking about the loss of a faculty, either mental or physical, following an injury sustained at work. The benefit that is payable from the scheme is for that loss of faculty, and will therefore continue to be paid because the loss of faculty will remain until the end of the person's life. That is rather different from a compensation payment.

Mr. Evans: Traditionally, that is not so. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's analysis is correct, although I suspect that at the end of the day it does not matter.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, between 1897 and 1946, when a Labour Government reformed the scheme, people had an option, although not a very comfortable one. Either they accepted no-fault payments under the scheme's predecessor, or they sued at common law and had to prove negligence or breach of statutory duty, which was difficult and expensive. At its inception, the scheme was perceived as an alternative to suing at law. When the 1946 reforms came in, instead of either/or it became both.

Mr. Skinner: Under a Labour Government.

Mr. Evans: I know what the hon. Gentleman says. I accept that the scheme has remained in that state since 1946 and of course it was a Labour Government who imposed it, but the point is that, in its modern form, the scheme remains one of statutory compensation and is distinct from benefits. We have been talking loosely in terms of benefits, but the scheme is not like the welfare benefits generally administered by my Department, but a form of compensation for a type of injury.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Evans: I have about half a second. I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Skinner: Yesterday in the handgun debate, as a result of representations about money, the Secretary of State for the Home Department said that he would consider finding extra money to resolve the gun lobby arguments. Will the Minister give the same guarantee on this matter when he has considered all the questions that have been asked by my hon. Friends?

Mr. Evans *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. We must now move to the next debate.

St Peter and St. James's Hospice

12.30 pm

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): I welcome the opportunity to raise this issue in the debate, which comes, by good chance, this morning. First, I will remind the House about some characteristics of the hospice movement, although I doubt whether any Members are unaware of them.

Through its in-patient facilities, the hospice movement provides specialist care for people in advanced stages of serious illness. Through day care, it provides opportunities for expert help with symptom control, for counselling and for other therapies, as well as mental and physical refreshment for patients living at home and for their carers. Home care is provided by qualified hospice staff to support community nursing services, to assist patients and carers in daily nursing routines and regular assessment, and to maintain an open door to in-patient respite care.

I mention all those services because they are less well known than the major and best known hospice service, which is in the treatment and care of people whose condition cannot be cured, particularly to reduce, if not eliminate, patient discomfort and to improve patients' quality of life. Specialists are there to allay fear, to prescribe possible treatment and to provide holistic support to improve the quality of life.

Time never stands still and the needs of people suffering terminal illness will always become greater and require increasing support. That is the function of marvellous hospices such as St. Peter and St. James's home and hospice at Wivelsfield Green in my constituency. The Minister's colleague, Baroness Cumberlege, who visited the hospice recently, can vouch for the impressive quality of its work. I must say immediately, however, that the benefit from the hospice's care and service covers adjacent constituencies as well as my own and is almost equally provided to patients from East Sussex and West Sussex, which causes part of the funding problem.

Hospice funding does not depend entirely on health authorities. Like other hospices, St. Peter and St. James's depends to a large extent on charitable donations. It is only through such generous public support that the hospice survives and can continue to give vital assistance so marvellously. It devotes much energy and innovation to fund-raising activities and local people are continually wonderfully generous, but health authorities also must contribute from the funds provided to them by Government to do so.

The Minister will know—indeed, his colleague has told me—that until last year Government funding was specific and had risen from £8 million in 1991 to £48 million in 1994-95, which is to be welcomed. Since then, funding has been built into health authorities' general allocations, with an aim to meet hospice needs on a 50:50 basis. The Department of Health guidance states specifically that removal of separate identification from funding for specialist palliative care—for hospices—should not be viewed in any way as representing a reduction in priority for that sector. That was confirmed by my hon. Friend the Minister for Health in his letter to me on 14 August.

The East Sussex, Brighton and Hove health authority's contract with St. Peter and St. James's is for three years—its last year is next year—at £50,942 per year. I am told that that equals only about one third of the cost of in-patient services alone. No extra funding is provided for day care or for home care services, either from the authority or from local social services. It appears that no more funds are available for this wonderful hospice while a new hospice is being developed in Brighton and Hove. It is invidious to choose between the two. Both need better support.

The picture is even bleaker with regard to funding from West Sussex. Patients from West Sussex, just across the nearby county border, represent approximately 50 per cent. of the hospice's work, but the authority provides only £10,550 per annum—an invidiously small remuneration for the wonderful services provided to many people for whom it is responsible. It is not prepared to pay for any day care services, thus forcing patients requiring those services from St. Peter and St. James's to pay for them themselves.

The net income from both East Sussex and West Sussex health authorities of just about £60,000 leaves St. Peter and St. James's with the need to raise between £400,000 and £500,000 each year. That is far removed from the 50:50 funding guideline goal and shows a dramatic reduction in priority for palliative care funding, contrary to the Government's guidelines.

I will give one dramatic illustration. Recently, an East Sussex AIDS patient in a West Sussex hospital was moved to St. Peter and St. James's with the promise of necessary funding to come with him. The money never appeared. The hospice became the pig in the middle between health authorities and social services. Eventually, money was agreed only under threat of having to move the patient elsewhere and receiving negative publicity for that action. Sadly, the money was paid only after the patient had died.

That was a human tragedy. The hospice charges for that AIDS patient are approximately one third of the cost elsewhere and the hospice's services for such a patient are infinitely better—indeed, unmatched. Professional and dedicated people are trying to do their best for a desperately ill and dying patient and for many others like him, but they are not being provided with the basic funds to do so. That is one illustration of an omnipresent problem which has threatened St. Peter and St. James's literally with closure, so desperate is its financial position. But for one generous and substantial donation out of the blue last week, the hospice would probably have been closing as we pursue the debate.

What do I ask my good and honourable friend the Minister to do? First, I ask him to issue new hospice funding guidelines to health authorities to ensure that proper funding is provided in at least the same proportions as previously provided under the specific ring-fenced money provisions of yesteryear. Secondly, he must ensure that health authorities move speedily—I stress speedily—to a 50:50 funding proportion, to establish a deadline for them to do so and to fund them accordingly. Thirdly, he should make certain that health authorities provide fair funding to cover the needs of patients from their region and do not hide behind contracts that have been overtaken by increasing needs, nor rely on the good will of people dedicated to provide those services while denying them the funds to do so, as the West Sussex health authority is doing. Fourthly, some better mechanism must be established for decision-making on funding matters between health authorities and social services to avoid

[Mr. Tim Rathbone]

in-fighting such as that recently faced by the St. Peter and St. James's AIDS patient. Fifthly, the Minister should make sure that the principles of the patients charter apply, so that patients go where they can get the services that they need and the funds go with them. Sixthly, and finally, my hon. Friend should see what can be done to provide assistance to hospices to help them to deal with health authorities and social services on a more equal basis in their contractual and financial dealings.

The House will realise that people in the advanced stages of illness, and often apparently approaching death, need special help. Hospices such as St. Peter and St. James's uniquely provide with care and dedication the specialist services required. They continue to deserve public support, and I am sure that they will continue to get it. But they also deserve better support from Government-funded bodies such as health authorities and social services departments. I call upon my friend the Minister to give that help.

12.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone), and I congratulate him on securing time for a debate on the funding of St. Peter and St. James's hospice. I have no doubt that it is an extremely important issue.

I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend. He feels that the hospice provides a valued service for the people of Lewes and Haywards Heath in East Sussex, and I understand any concern that he has for its future.

Before I respond to my hon. Friend's concerns about funding, I should like to express sadness at the untimely although not entirely unexpected death of Julian Wellesley, chairman of the East Sussex, Brighton and Hove health authority. He was a well respected man, with a successful career in finance and commerce. He devoted considerable time and energy to the health service, and was appointed to the position of health authority chairman in 1990. He proved to be an outstanding chairman, leading his authority with great style and skill, and his name will live on in the many improvements to local health services that he pushed through.

Mr. Rathbone: I should like to add my support for my hon. Friend's words. I knew Julian Wellesley for many years before I came to the House. He started his work in the health service on the board of Eastbourne general hospital. He was then appointed chairman of Eastbourne health authority and most recently he was a marvellous chairman of East Sussex, Brighton and Hove health authority. He engineered the bringing together of the local health authorities and community care providers under one wing. I believe that my hon. Friend's words are justified.

Mr. Horam: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

I know something about St. Peter and St. James's home and hospice from my colleague, Lady Cumberlege, who visited the premises on 20 August, as my hon. Friend said. She was very impressed by what she saw. The charity's efforts are obviously much appreciated by patients and the local community.

St. Peter and St. James's home was built 20 years ago to provide residential care for severely disabled people and elderly people. It branched into hospice care in the early 1990s. The hospice comprises six in-patient beds and a new day centre. It also provides home support services for patients in the community.

St. Peter and St. James's is one of a number of hospices in Sussex. Like other voluntary hospices, it is funded from charitable sources, and also by the health authorities. I will have more to say about health authority funding of hospices, which ultimately comes from the taxpayer, of course, but first I should like to pay tribute to the excellent work done by charities up and down the country in raising many millions of pounds every year for hospice care. None of us is under any illusion about how difficult it can be to raise the sums required, and we are extremely grateful for the considerable unpaid time and effort so generously given by so many people.

I should make it absolutely clear that our commitment to palliative care is undiminished. I also remind the House that the United Kingdom is a recognised world leader in the care of the terminally ill. Significant advances have been made in pain and symptom control and in improving the overall quality of life for patients with cancer and other life-threatening illnesses. The aim of our policies is to ensure that the benefits of those improvements in treatment and care are available to all patients, wherever they may live.

The spectrum of palliative care provision and support required to meet patients' and carers' needs continues throughout the patient's illness and into the carer's bereavement. It ranges from the promotion of physical and social well-being to highly specialist palliative care involving physical, psychological, social and spiritual support. It is provided in both community and in-patient settings. It will vary according to the stage of illness, and may be required from the time of diagnosis.

To provide such services, the Government's support for hospice and specialist palliative care services has, as my hon. Friend acknowledged, increased sixfold between 1990 and 1994. In 1994, that funding reached nearly £48 million. As of January this year, there were 171 hospices operating in England, with a total of 2,599 beds, 308 home care teams, 89 hospital support teams and 191 day hospices. Some of those are part of larger national voluntary bodies, but most are locally based individual charities such as the St. Peter and St. James's hospice. As the House will appreciate, the care of the terminally ill nationally is a large undertaking, which has grown enormously in the past 10 years.

As my hon. Friend said, since 1994, funding for specialist palliative care has been built into health authorities' allocations and has not been ring-fenced as it originally was. My hon. Friend is concerned that that practice has diminished support. I can tell him that my Department has a good working relationship with the National Council for Hospice and Specialist Palliative Care Services. We rely on that organisation to identify local problems. The council is co-ordinating a survey of all health authorities and is interviewing those responsible for palliative care. The picture is incomplete because the survey is expected to be published early next year, but the evidence so far is that health authorities are at least maintaining—I emphasise that word—their palliative care funding levels.

The change in the funding approach was designed to ensure that health authorities planned for palliative care in the same way as they planned for other health services. Health authorities are free to negotiate with individual providers the level and form of support required to meet the palliative care needs of their population. That flexibility in the use of funding has enabled the palliative approach to become more widely adopted in all settings, including hospices, hospitals, nursing homes and the patient's own home.

It is, of course, essential that hospices and health authorities work in partnership when drawing up and developing local strategies for palliative care. Agreement between them must be based on the assessed health needs of the resident population and should take into account local priorities, available resources and existing patterns of services. That should allow resources to be used effectively and avoid undue duplication.

It is also important for health authorities to ensure that new developments do not divert resources from established palliative care units if they are delivering high quality care. That fact needs to be emphasised in the context of today's debate as I know that St. Peter and St. James's is a valued as well as an established palliative care unit. I am sure that that point will not be lost on the health authorities. Indeed, if there was any danger of that, we re-emphasised that point as recently as 15 October 1995 in guidance to all health authorities.

East Sussex, Brighton and Hove health authority and West Sussex health authority are responsible for contracting for palliative care services in Sussex and the area served by the St. Peter and St. James's hospice. While I understand the wish of that hospice and those connected with it to secure as much funding as possible from their health authorities, it is for the two Sussex health authorities, as purchasers of health care for their residents, to determine what level of resources to devote to palliative care, and which particular providers to use.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewes referred to the level of support being provided and mentioned a total contribution of approximately £60,000 from the two health authorities to the more than £400,000 required to maintain the hospice. Those are large sums of money for the authorities, but I readily agree that they are small in relation to the total sum required. My hon. Friend was correct to say that approximately 30 per cent. of the costs of patients from East Sussex are being matched by funds from their health authority, and that the percentage provided by the West Sussex authority to maintain patients from its area is even smaller—perhaps as low as 10 per cent.

Mr. Rathbone: I remind the Minister that those figures apply only to funding for in-patient services and not for other services.

Mr. Horam: I accept that, but those are the amounts being provided by the two health authorities.

The matter of what resources are available to the health authorities is a separate issue. As a Member of Parliament representing a Sussex constituency, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes will be aware of the difficulties faced by the West Sussex and the East Sussex, Brighton and Hove health authorities. This year, the disparity between the target and actual amounts that the East Sussex health authority should receive is more than £18 million, while for West Sussex the amount is more than £15 million. Those disparities are among the worst in the country. My hon. Friend will be aware that the authorities are some distance from the target amount of funding that they should receive.

My hon. Friend will also be aware that we are endeavouring to diminish the disparity between the ideal and actual amounts over time. Therefore, this year the two authorities received increases that were very much higher than inflation. They can also expect increases very much above inflation in future years. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be aware of the commitment made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at the Conservative party conference to real-term increases in the health budget, which will be reflected in the amount of money going to health authorities.

At this time of year, health authorities do not know how much money they will receive next year, but they will know fairly soon. I hope that the authorities will appreciate the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes in this debate and bear in mind the situation facing St. Peter and St. James's hospice when they consider the disposition of their resources, which have been increased in real terms. I hope that they will consider the situation very carefully when they know where they stand.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewes made an important point about the need for co-operation between the two health authorities. It is important that the problem does not slip between the fingers of both authorities as they are both taking their own point of view and not co-operating with one another. I am glad to be able to tell my hon. Friend that there is correspondence between the two authorities on the matter. As he knows, there is also correspondence outstanding between the hospice and the West Sussex health authority. So the problem is being dealt with. My hon. Friend also raised the important issue of ascertaining the exact financial position. I agree that that must happen soon, and I hope that the two authorities will talk with the hospice to deal with the problem.

I hope that my reply has reassured my hon. Friend that I should like the problems to be dealt with urgently by the health authorities, after they are made aware of the resources that will be available to them in the next financial year.

Mr. Rathbone: A couple of questions arise from the Minister's reply—which I much appreciated. He has certainly reassured me about what he would like to see happen, but it does not reassure me about the behaviour of the authorities. There have been long-drawn-out conversations between the East Sussex, Brighton and Hove authority and the West Sussex authority, which have reached a complete impasse. Based on my correspondence with the authorities, they have shown no sign in the past year of overcoming that impasse. Any additional guidelines that the Minister can provide would help. Any assistance that he can give to hospices, so that they can be on a more equal footing in their contractual arrangements, would also be appreciated.

The Minister mentioned the need to close the funding gap for the two authorities to bring them up to the national norm. Therefore—I did not anticipate that the debate

[Mr. Rathbone]

would reach this conclusion—the problems of the St. Peter and St. James's hospice rest on the shoulders of the Minister.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that interventions should be used to intervene in the debate and not to make a second speech.

Mr. Rathbone: I agree absolutely, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I stand admonished by your ruling. I was seeking clarification from the Minister on two extremely important points. I hope that he has taken them on board. He still has a moment in which to apply his mind to them.

Mr. Horam: First, I realise that the problem has been a matter of debate between the two authorities. As a result of the points made by my hon. Friend in this debate, and particularly because of the immediacy of the financial problems faced by the hospice, I shall ask the authorities to re-examine the matter, in conjunction with the hospice, to discover the exact financial problems.

Secondly, I can reassure my hon. Friend that we realise the funding problems faced by the authorities. We hope that there will be further progress in narrowing the gap between the authorities' current position and the norm in the announcement about health authority funding for the next financial year. That will mean increased real resources for the two health authorities to tackle the problem and will allow them to give the problem the priority that they would wish to accord it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. As the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) and the Minister are in the Chamber, we can begin the next debate early.

Hillingdon Hospital (Cleaners' Dispute)

12.57 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am pleased that we have an extra three minutes for the debate, because it is about a matter of great importance. I should say that I have corresponded with the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) on the matter, and I am glad that he is in the Chamber today. In accordance with previous rulings from Madam Speaker, I sent him a note last night to confirm that I would be speaking in the debate.

I should also say that I am a member of Unison, which is the union involved in the dispute. I am a former official of Unison, and was supported by it in the most recent general election. I am very proud to be a member of Unison and to be involved with it.

The dispute has been going on for just over a year. A group of women and one man, who are cleaners at the Hillingdon hospital, have been trying to get back their jobs. They have stood outside the hospital in foul, wet weather and in fine, dry weather, suffering harassment, abuse and abominable behaviour by passers-by. They have also suffered at the hands of the obdurate management of a very large, wealthy and powerful company, known as Pall Mall Services.

The background to the dispute is that, in October 1994, Pall Mall, Healthcare Support Services won a contract to provide cleaning services at the Hillingdon hospital. It sent all staff a letter, on 3 October 1994, which stated:

"Re: Transfer Of Contract—Initial Healthcare Services to Pall Mall Healthcare—Hillingdon Hospital, 17.10.94.

We are delighted to have won the contract to provide support services at Hillingdon Hospital and are pleased to confirm, following our presentation and individual meeting, your transfer from Initial Healthcare Services to Pall Mall Healthcare on 17th October 1994.

We will shortly be completing a contract of employment for you, but as you are transferring under the Transfer of Undertaking Regulations, your terms and conditions will remain the same.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you in advance for your help in making the transfer as smooth as possible and look forward to a successful working partnership as part of the Pall Mall team."

Those were high hopes indeed.

One year later, a number of staff received a letter saying:

"We wrote to you on 30th June 1995 giving you notice that your contract of employment would terminate on 30th September 1995 and confirming that a new contract of employment was on offer from 1st October. We wrote to you again on 29th August once again to offer you the opportunity to accept the new contract of employment.

We are sorry that you have chosen not to accept our offers of a new contract and confirm that accordingly your contract of employment terminated with effect from Saturday 30th September 1995.

If you wish to accept our offer it remains available for acceptance at the moment but will expire without further notice when we have no further vacancies."

There is an entire story between those two letters. Pall Mall took over the cleaning of Hillingdon hospital and, in accordance with the law, maintained the staff under the conditions set out in the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employees) Regulations 1981, and confirmed in writing that they would continue to be paid properly. Yet a very short time into the contract, Pall Mall

did what it has tried to do in a number of hospitals—indeed, unfortunately, contract cleaners across the national health service too often try to do it—by introducing new pay and conditions, abolishing London weighting and forcing wage cuts of between £25 and £35 a week on people who were already receiving very low wages. The women concerned quite rightly said that they were not prepared to sign the new contracts of employment. They had been taken on in good faith by Pall Mall and had good faith in the company. Pall Mall broke that faith and tried to force the women to accept lower wages and worse working conditions, which is absolutely disgraceful.

Accordingly, Pall Mall took the opportunity to dismiss the cleaners. I have a list of some comparisons between the former terms and conditions and the new ones which shows, for example, that London weighting is no longer applicable, holidays are reduced, sick pay is likely to be reduced and basic wages are lowered. Indeed, the whole gamut of working conditions has been made considerably worse for the women employed at the hospital.

We must ask what is the Pall Mall group and why is it behaving in such a way. It is a very large organisation; it employs more than 10,000 people. Its turnover is more than £70 million a year. Its profits are more than £2 million a year. In 1994, it recorded a profit of £2.2 million, yet the giant organisation is built on sweat, low wages, poor working conditions and aggressive management techniques. The average pay of those in Pall Mall employment is not much more than £5,000 a year. Six Pall Mall directors pay themselves more than £300,000 a year. In other words, they consider themselves more valuable than 63 cleaners. That is the sort of organisation with which we are dealing.

Although the company was forced in 1994 to accept the TUPE regulations, it has not tried to adhere to them. Indeed, it has constantly harassed and lobbied the Government in its efforts to amend or renegotiate its way out of them because, when it wins a contract to take over cleaning in a hospital or any other place, it does not like to have to honour existing terms and conditions or take on the existing staff. It is not a model employer by any means. It has been found against in disputes on a number of occasions—most prominently and recently in a case of persistent sexual harassment against one woman employee, for which it had to pay out £10,000.

The purpose of today's debate is to bring to the attention of the House and—I hope—a much wider public what is going on in Hillingdon and many other hospitals. People who work for the NHS do so because they believe in it; they believe in universal health care. Some of the women at Hillingdon hospital have given 30 years' service to cleaning it. People might ask what is a cleaner. If one wants an efficient hospital that is properly run and managed, one needs managers, doctors, nurses and technicians, but one also needs catering staff, cleaners and maintenance workers. One needs people who are properly employed and treated in order to run a hospital.

The women concerned have given 30 years to ensuring that the hospital is a decent, clean and safe place to work. The huge, very profitable organisation of Pall Mall came along and took over the contract, probably realising fully that the price that it had offered for the takeover was unsustainable and that it would therefore cut the women's wages. In other words, it conned people in order to get the contract in the first place. It is abominable that the women were thrown out of their jobs as a result of the way in which Pall Mall behaved and are campaigning for their reinstatement. They are strongly supported by my union in the campaign.

Sir Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): As the hon. Gentleman has pointed out, Hillingdon hospital is in my constituency. I am sure that he knows that about 200 of the 230 members of staff accepted the conditions offered by Pall Mall Services. Those who did not have been engaged in the industrial action to which he has referred, although, happily that has not had an impact on the service provided by the hospital to patients. The hospital's trust has, with my full support and in response to my urging, attempted to bring both sides of the dispute together and to reach a settlement. Earlier in the year, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service brokered an agreement, which I believe was recommended by Unison but rejected by the staff concerned. It appears that the next step in the saga will be for the matter to go before an industrial tribunal. Will the hon. Gentleman comment on the agreement that Unison tried to broker and why it was rejected? He has told the House that he is a member of Unison and it may be valuable for him to comment.

Mr. Corbyn: I would have been happier if the hon. Gentleman had said that he supported the women's predicament and recognised the injustice that they feel. People do not reject offers of jobs without having very strong reasons for doing so. I think that they were absolutely entitled to reject the offer. The women have been wrongfully dismissed by Pall Mall and, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, their case is to be taken to a tribunal.

Sir Michael Shersby: I was present at the hospital's annual general meeting and listened to the views expressed by the staff who were not offered new contracts under Unison. I have had further meetings with the hospital management as a result. One of the reasons why I am present is to tell the House that. I think that the hon. Gentleman will be assured of my concern.

Mr. Corbyn: Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman's comments do not reassure me at all. He has said that he has met the hospital management and other staff who, for their own reasons, fears or whatever else, accepted new contracts and conditions, but has not said whether he supports the women who have been thrown out of their jobs by the wealthy Pall Mall company. Does he think that it is right that women cleaners should work for less than £3 an hour?

Sir Michael Shersby: I made it clear that I listened to the staff who had lost their jobs as a result of the events that the hon. Gentleman has described. It was as a result of listening to them that I immediately asked for further meetings with the hospital staff in an effort to bring to an end the regrettable dispute. There is no lack of sympathy or understanding on my part with the staff concerned.

Mr. Corbyn: I am glad that that is so. Given that, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will give his support to the women who have been standing outside the hospital for a year trying to get their jobs back and to ensure that all cleaners in all hospitals are paid a decent living wage. He

[Mr. Corbyn]

and I would not like to work for, or try to live on, £3 an hour; we probably could not. Why should they or anybody else have to do so? Ancillary staff are treated disgracefully in the health service anyway, but those employed by contractors are considerably worse off. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise the absolute justice of the women's case and the wide support that they enjoy in the local community, from my trade union, Unison, and from a number of other unions.

People have had enough of this cavalier, anti-trade union approach to management which says that it does not matter how low the wages are provided that somebody can be found to do the job. In a time of high unemployment, it is possible to get people to do jobs for disgracefully low wages. That does not make such practices right, happy or just. I want to draw attention to the plight of the workers at Hillingdon hospital.

The Minister has a trade union background, even though he turned his back on it some years ago. Perhaps he can tell us why the national health service internal market deliberately encourages contractors to cut costs, to worsen conditions and to treat contract workers in that way. We would be far better off if we ended the principle of the internal market and instead started treating all national health service staff as crucial parts of a team that ensures that we have good-quality hospitals and working conditions.

The Minister must recognise that all is not well in this dispute any more than all is well in the current dispute in Northern Ireland. He should intervene to ensure that Pall Mall takes the staff back and employs them under conditions no less favourable than those that they were given in writing when the contract was taken over in 1994.

We should go a stage further than that. When contracts come up for renewal, we should end the principle of contracting out cleaning services and take staff directly into national health service employment so that they can be assured of good-quality working conditions and training.

There are problems and dangers for us all in the employment of contract workers. There have been many contract failures in the national health service, with cleaning being inadequately or badly done, staff being badly trained or untrained and incoming staff not being given health checks. Many issues need to be addressed.

The purpose of the debate is to draw attention to what has happened at Hillingdon hospital and the way in which those women have been treated. The wider community, particularly the Government, must intervene to stop the abuse of power by Pall Mall and the Pontius Pilate attitude of the hospital trust, replicated by the Department of Health, which is saying, "It is nothing to do with us. It is all a matter for the market."

Imagine the situation of people whose jobs have been sold to another employer over their heads and who are told a few months later, "Sorry. We did not really mean the promises that we gave you. We did not really mean to give you the undertakings that we gave six months ago. That was all window dressing to get the contract. Would you kindly accept a cut in wages, worse working conditions and less holiday pay? Would you kindly accept less enhanced pay for overtime, night time and weekend working? In other words, would you kindly do whatever we want you to do?" What would any of us do if faced with such a situation?

I do not blame those women for what they did. I have the deepest admiration and support for them, as, I believe, do many other people in hospitals, even those who felt that they had no alternative but to accept the unbridled power of the marketplace which forces them into worse working conditions.

My plea is for the Government to intervene to ensure that everybody working in a national health service institution enjoys conditions at least as good as nationally negotiated and agreed NHS conditions. The Minister must recognise that this obscenity can be put right only when proper national conditions are applicable to all workers.

The women are fighting a battle of enormous principle that will go down in history as such, akin to the current dispute at the Liverpool docks and other episodes in the great history of trade union struggles in this country when workers have stood up and said that they are not prepared to allow employers to ride roughshod over them and destroy a lifetime's gains in working conditions. Pall Mall should have some respect for 30 years' service in the NHS rather than casting those women out on the stones outside in the freezing air to campaign for their reinstatement.

I am proud to be associated with the trade union that supports those members. I very much hope that, soon, those women will be back in work in that hospital, able to continue the dedicated service that they have given to the national health service, rather than suffering disgraceful treatment at the hands of Pall Mall. We need to get a grip on the power of cleaning companies and their awful treatment of so many of their staff. Will the Minister explain why he has apparently been unable for so long to do anything and what he will do to ensure justice for these women?

1.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): It is most regrettable that the dispute has remained unresolved for more than a year. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) has made extreme efforts, which he has mentioned during the debate, to bring it to a resolution. However, it has not been resolved.

I sympathise with the predicament of those involved, but the parties to the dispute are a private company and a number of cleaning workers who parted with that company last year. I stress that the workers were not national health service employees at the time. The hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) may have given the contrary impression. Many of them had not been employees in the national health service for more than six years. Neither the national health service managers at Hillingdon nor I have any jurisdiction over the matter. Furthermore, given that industrial tribunal proceedings are now in progress, with the aggrieved workers claiming unfair dismissal by Pall Mall, we should be particularly careful to avoid any comment that might prejudice the case.

I must make one other point clear from the outset. The hospital has at all times during the dispute continued to provide its customary excellent service to patients. At no time has the quality of cleaning at the hospital been compromised and the contractor has continued to fulfil all

its contractual obligations at the hospital. Patients, their relatives and friends and the residents of Hillingdon can be assured of the quality of health care provided by the hospital. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge will want to endorse that, particularly considering last week's debate on another matter.

Before discussing the circumstances of the dispute at Hillingdon, I should like to comment generally on the Government's policy on market testing—an issue that the hon. Member for Islington, North raised—particularly as it relates to non-core NHS services. By testing services through competition, we seek to ensure that the support services provided to national health service hospitals are the best available and provide the best value for money. Whether a support service is provided by the public or private sector depends solely on who best satisfies the criteria of quality and value.

As a result of the market testing initiative, the national health service has saved more than £1 billion since 1983. That means that £1 billion for investment in patient care has been made available. Apart from the cost savings achieved, market testing has also led to greater innovation, better specification of service needs and improved management, releasing resources from non-core support services and making them available for the core business of improving health and patient care, which is what the national health service is all about.

We estimate that the service contracts currently in place in the national health service are achieving an annual saving of between £100 million and £150 million. Again, that is money for use in direct patient care.

Mr. Corbyn: The Minister is keen to quote savings of between £100 million and £150 million on NHS contracts. Does he recognise that that saving comes straight out of the pockets of the lowest-paid people in the national health service, creating more poverty, worse working conditions and worse living conditions for many people? Is he proud of that?

Mr. Horam: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. The service improvement has come from a reconfiguration of services and greater efficiency by the providers. There has been no loss of quality in the service and, often, pay has not been reduced. The hon. Gentleman mentioned pay at Hillingdon. The rate for cleaners there is £3.69 an hour—one of the best in the area according to the Uxbridge and Hayes job centres. General airport cleaners at Heathrow—broadly comparable with Hillingdon staff—earn £3.50 an hour. The pay conditions implemented by Pall Mall at Hillingdon are no worse than is general for the area. Not only that, the hon. Gentleman failed to mention that, when the changes in the TUPE arrangements were negotiated, the workers were offered compensation of between £400 and £1,000. The hon. Gentleman cannot, therefore, say that the provider has behaved badly in this case.

Mr. Corbyn: I am glad that the Minister has given way on that point. He failed to say that the overtime and weekend rates were cut as a result of the change. Does he recognise—it is important that he does—that Pall Mall had a contractual agreement with the cleaners which it unilaterally broke in 1995? That is the nub of the argument. The company gave a solemn undertaking in October 1994 that the staff would be employed, under TUPE, on existing conditions of service. It broke that undertaking and subsequently dismissed the women from their jobs.

Mr. Horam: If the hon. Gentleman is reasonable, he will recognise—

Mr. Corbyn: I am.

Mr. Horam: I am glad to hear it. The hon. Gentleman should recognise that the changes were a result of renegotiation—for which compensation was paid—which was part of a change in the services that the provider wished to make.

Mr. Corbyn: I do not accept that.

Mr. Horam: Well, the fact is that the hon. Gentleman's own union negotiated an agreement which the workers did not accept. The hon. Gentleman made great play of the point that we should stand up for workers' rights and so forth, but when the union of which he is a member said to the workers in the dispute, "We advise you to settle on the terms that Pall Mall is willing to offer", they refused. Where does the hon. Gentleman stand? Is he in favour of trade union members accepting what has been negotiated by their officers or not?

Mr. Corbyn: The Minister and I both have a background of trade union negotiation and activity. The difference is that he pretends to forget it, whereas I do not. He knows perfectly well that, on many occasions, a union recommends something to its members which they subsequently do not accept. The duty of the union is then to continue to represent those members until they are satisfied with what is on offer. Unison has continued to represent those members, and it continues to campaign for their reinstatement and to try to force Pall Mall to keep to the agreement that it made in October 1994. What the public need to know from the Minister is whether he supports the Pall Mall group in its unilateral reneging on the conditions under which it employed the women in October 1994.

Mr. Horam: The hon. Gentleman acknowledged the point that, unlike some of my colleagues, I have particular experience of trade unions. What that taught me was the realism that trade union negotiators often bring to situations where two sides may be very divided on what they wish to achieve. The practical negotiating skills that trade union negotiators often deploy should not be ignored. The fact is that Unison negotiators achieved an agreement which was then unilaterally turned down by the workers in question. One has to question why that was. I take no side on the issue, but I merely point out the facts. An agreement was brokered by Unison which the workers felt it right to turn down, for whatever reasons.

Before I was slightly sidetracked by the hon. Gentleman—quite reasonably, and I am not complaining about that—I was justifying the Government's approach to market testing. Market testing offers a practical and proven way in which to determine the best way in which to meet support service needs, in terms of both quality and value for money. It also gives local managers opportunities regularly to review support services in the

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light of market developments and in response to local circumstances and needs. Legislation ensures that employees' rights are protected when there is a transfer of an undertaking and guidance on market testing incorporating advice on the legislation has been issued to the national health service generally.

If a contract is awarded under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981, which we all know as TUPE, staff transfer to the new contractor. Under TUPE, the new service provider, who is usually an incoming contractor, takes over the contracts of employment of all employees who were employed in the undertaking at the time of the relevant transfer. It is then up to him after a suitable period, if he wishes to do so, to renegotiate the contracts in the light of the situation as he sees it. It is not unusual to find that, in such a situation, the new provider offers compensation for any changes that he may wish to make in the contracts.

It is interesting that, of the people working for Pall Mall, as my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge said, 200 accepted all the changes. The only people who did not do so were a particular group of workers who decided to go against the views of their own union and not to accept the position.

I shall now return to the position at Hillingdon. Hillingdon hospital market tested its hotel services in 1994 and awarded a five-year contract to Pall Mall in October of that year. The hotel services concerned were catering, sterile services, laundry and portering, as well as cleaning, which had originally been contracted out to a different firm in the late 1980s.

The estimated savings achieved against previous costs were £500,000 on a contract for hotel services worth about £4 million. The contract won by Pall Mall at Hillingdon hospital was one to which TUPE applied. As a result, both the national health service workers affected and the domestic staff, who were already privately employed, became employees of Pall Mall, keeping their existing terms and conditions of employment.

Pall Mall spent six months in negotiation and consultation over new contracts for the transferred staff. The package included new shift patterns and rates of pay comparable with other employees in similar jobs in the area. I have spelled out the exact figures for the hon. Gentleman. More than 90 per cent. of the transferred work force signed the new contracts in autumn 1995. Regrettably, 30 domestic staff refused to accept the new contract and their existing contracts were terminated by Pall Mall on 31 October last year. A further 22 staff signed the new contract but never went back to work and were deemed by Pall Mall to have dismissed themselves.

Earlier this year, ACAS brokered an arrangement between the parties in the dispute which was recommended by Unison, as I mentioned, but which its members unfortunately rejected. The reasonableness or otherwise of that arrangement is not something on which I wish to comment, given the current industrial tribunal hearing.

The fact is that Pall Mall employs approximately 210 staff at Hillingdon hospital. None is on strike and Pall Mall is meeting its contractual obligations at the hospital under the contract for the hotel and cleaning services.

What concerns me is the action taken by some of the more vociferous individuals involved in the dispute. I understand that at one point, pickets using loudhailers were causing such a commotion that the hospital was concerned for the treatment of patients in intensive care. Hospital management pleaded with the pickets to moderate their behaviour. There are, therefore, questions about the behaviour of the pickets and not only about the behaviour of the management.

Mr. Corbyn: I have been waiting for the Minister to get on to smearing people who have lost their jobs as a result of a contract granted to a wealthy multinational corporation. Can the Minister now tell us—I have asked him this three times already—whether he approves of Pall Mall's action in imposing new conditions of service on staff in breach of its undertaking in October 1994? An important principle is involved. The Minister should recognise the justice of the workers' case and the strong passions aroused by the company's behaviour instead of attacking people who are trying to defend their existing conditions of service.

Mr. Horam: I was pointing out that I am responsible for the health service. I was also pointing out that some patients at Hillingdon were being seriously inconvenienced and that their health may have been detrimentally affected by the behaviour of the pickets outside. I deplore that, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman does too. Whatever he may feel about the rights of the pickets in question, he should realise that they should not interfere with the provision of health care at Hillingdon hospital. Does he accept that? The hon. Gentleman says nothing, but I feel as strongly about that point as he does about his case.

Mr. Corbyn: Those women gave 30 years to the national health service. They have shown a greater commitment to the national health service than the Minister and his Government have ever shown. He should intervene in the dispute to ensure justice for the women rather than raising what are, in effect, red herrings surrounding the serious issue of the disgraceful treatment of the employees concerned.

Mr. Horam: Interfering with the proper treatment of health service patients is not to be taken lightly. I am disappointed by the hon. Gentleman's attitude.

The fact is that Pall Mall took over and ACAS brokered an agreement which was agreed to by Unison, of which the hon. Gentleman is a member, but the workers in question did not choose to accept it, for whatever reasons. I am not commenting on those reasons; the workers obviously feel that they have justice on their side. Others may take a different view. Those are the facts of the matter. I hope that, when the industrial tribunal looks at the case, it will take all aspects into account and will come to a reasonable conclusion. That is the right and proper thing to do and I am sure that that will be done.

In the mean time, Pall Mall continues to fulfil all its contract requirements to Hillingdon hospital. It is regrettable that a few of Pall Mall's workers came to be in dispute with the company and, as I have said, it is now for the industrial tribunal to consider the rights and wrongs of the case.

The dispute is not a matter for the health service or for me. There is no suggestion that Hillingdon hospital has not acted properly at all times. On the issue of market testing, which the hon. Gentleman raised more generally, the Government do not intend to change a policy that has saved the national health service more than £1 billion. Market testing of national health service support services is not about contracting out services; it is aimed at producing more cost-effective services and better value for money from whatever source. That is precisely what has been achieved at Hillingdon and countless other hospitals. We certainly intend to continue what is an extremely sensible policy for the health of the nation.

Unitary Development Plan (Hillingdon)

1.29 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): I have two reasons to be grateful for the opportunity to discuss the proposed changes by Hillingdon borough council to the draft unitary development plan. First, the new planning proposals set out by the borough council cause the most acute local concern I have ever experienced in the 17 years that I have represented Ruislip-Northwood. Secondly, they raise aspects of environmental and housing policy that are of national significance, as they demonstrate the need to encourage the private rented sector, rather than relying on housing association developments subsidised by the taxpayer.

My constituency is largely residential, with some light industry at its southernmost extremity. Most people commute to London by tube or train, or travel by car to work at Heathrow airport or Stockley park or along the A4-M4 and A40-M40 corridors. Unemployment is the lowest of any Greater London constituency and, despite constant developmental pressures, limited school places and traffic congestion, Ruislip-Northwood is a pleasant place to live, to raise a family and to retire. It has excellent schools, good recreational facilities and playing fields and a high proportion of owner-occupied homes. In short, it comprises a harmonious blend of residential districts and public open space, underpinned with carefully designated, well preserved, green chain and metropolitan green belt areas.

That crucial harmony and balance have been deliberately put at risk by the Labour borough council's proposed changes to the UDP. When the plans became public in late July, proposing social housing development on up to 50 acres of green chain land, I immediately wrote to the leader of the Labour borough council, Councillor Chris Rogers, to protest that the wholesale social housing developments which were being promoted by the socialist borough council put at risk the quality of life of my constituents, would damage the environment irreparably and would be fiercely resisted by local residents.

It is worth quoting my letter verbatim, as it summarises the arguments clearly—not one of which was addressed by the Labour council leader in his curt reply:

"I am in receipt of your letter of 22nd July 1996. Your comments have been noted."

Hon. Members will agree that maintaining the value of my constituents' homes, retaining playing fields and recreation grounds for their children and designated public open spaces in a green chain of protected areas for people to walk, exercise their dogs and breathe freely when so much of their daily lives is spent strap-hanging on the underground travelling to and from work and enduring endless traffic jams, noise from aircraft and motorways, are worthy planning priorities for any responsible outer London borough.

Under the heading "Urbanisation of Ruislip-Northwood", I wrote as follows:

"Dear Councillor Rogers, I have been informed by Councillors in my constituency that Hillingdon Borough Council has arbitrarily and peremptorily altered the Hillingdon Draft Development Plan so as to permit the construction of very substantial amounts of social housing within my constituency.

First it would have been courteous if the Council had informed me in advance. Secondly and much more importantly these proposed developments on important predominantly green areas within Ruislip-Northwood will seriously degrade the local environment and prejudice the important amenity areas for local constituents.

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

The Field End Road and Sidmouth Drive recreation grounds are much appreciated by local people. Children have all too few areas on which to play and *that the Council should deliberately curtail* recreation space for children will be much resented and rightly, bitterly contested.

Likewise the St. Vincent's Hospital site is a particularly beautiful semi secluded area on the edge of Haste Hill which an aesthetically sensitive council responsible to the feelings of local people would wish to preserve.

It is clear that the Council has its own agenda to put as much open space as possible under concrete and brick. I believe my constituents will contest these thoroughly undesirable plans implacably and that they will organise to save our green fields from the clutches of inappropriate Council-sponsored developments.

Coming on top of your publicly quoted observations in favour of a Warner Bros Theme Park on green belt land in Uxbridge"—

in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby), who is here supporting me and is president of the Metropolitan London Green Belt Council—

"it is clear that preserving the quality of life for local residents from undesirable urbanisation does not feature as a policy of Hillingdon Borough Council.

A little bit of imagination and sensitivity to local feelings could preserve an attractive environment for generations to come. The Council clearly prefers to promote an impersonal urban sprawl. I give you notice that it will be fiercely resisted."

It is small wonder that local people have been incensed. They see elected Labour councillors, who should be the custodians of the local environment and quality of life, deliberately setting their face against them. The civic centre has been inundated with thousands of objections. Public meetings have been held on Field End recreation ground and Sidmouth drive playing fields, and protest handbills are displayed in countless windows nearby.

Local Members, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) who sent a message of support and has done much locally, and my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks), who is in his place, have been strenuous in their opposition, as have local residents' associations such as south Ruislip residents association in my constituency and Roxbourne residents association in Harrow, West. The Conservative councillors' group on Hillingdon borough council and responsible conservation groups, such as the Hillingdon group of the London Wildlife Trust, Friends of the Earth and the Sports Council have all protested in meticulous detail, itemising the environmental damage that would ensue from the plans.

Sir Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I fully support what my hon. Friend has said today. Does he agree that the general thrust of the modifications should concern the House and the Minister—that the plan seeks to

"contribute as far as possible to the Borough's identified housing needs by seeking to ensure the highest acceptable number of new dwellings are provided in the form of affordable housing".

It takes no account of the need for other varieties of housing in the borough and is putting at risk green belt sites, green chain sites and other land locally.

The local authority has argued that the council has revised housing allocation, and is planning a 10 per cent. increase. That information came from the London Planning Advisory Committee. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will say a word or two about that.

It has also been argued by council officers that the inspector considering the original draft development plan made a comment to the effect that Hillingdon should be more proactive in the provision of such housing. *I challenged them to show me where those words* appeared. They do not appear anywhere; they are an interpretation by the council's officers, as was admitted to me at a recent meeting.

Mr. Wilkinson *rose—*

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Wilkinson: I shall proceed for a sentence or two before giving way to my hon. Friend.

To his great credit, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment lodged his objections with Hillingdon borough council, which was an extremely responsible and unusual action and helped to concentrate the mind of the local authority. His action induced the council to bow to popular pressure and to withdraw the Sidmouth drive playing fields in my constituency from its plans for social housing development.

Mr. Dicks: Both my hon. Friends the Members for Ruislip–Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) and for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) will recall that back in the '70s we had problems with the infamous Alderman John Bartlett, who wanted to turn Ruislip-Northwood into one massive council estate for political reasons. When the Conservatives took power in 1978—I was the housing chairman—I was presented with a waiting list of 10,000 people. It was completely false, because it contained the names of people who had bought their own homes or been rehoused years before. I am convinced that the figures in Hillingdon today have been falsified to justify what is called social housing—I call it council housing—and to turn even more of Ruislip-Northwood, parts of Uxbridge and parts of my constituency into council estates.

Mr. Wilkinson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who brings incomparable experience of great relevance to the subject. The question of density is crucial and my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge referred to the lack of balance, which perturbs my constituents particularly.

Now that the crucial democratic precedent has been established over Sidmouth drive playing fields, the council should also withdraw its proposals to build social housing on Field End road recreation ground in my constituency. The surface of the recreation ground is currently pockmarked with large boreholes, dug at the behest of the council at the council taxpayers' expense.

I tabled four parliamentary questions to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment about his commendable intervention. It is worth recording the reply yesterday by my hon. Friend the Minister who has responsibility for London:

"Objections were made by my right hon Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to twenty six proposed modifications. The objections were made to modifications that appeared to bring the plan into conflict with national or regional policies without good reason and where that was proposed would result in the plan lacking clarity such that it could cause great difficulties to users later.

Twelve modifications concerned Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land; six modifications would produce policies or proposals that were unclear or imprecise; and three modifications conflicted

with our preferred approach to planning and affordable housing. A further five modifications to which objections were made related to proposals for residential development on two recreation grounds.

Objections to the published modifications in respect of the deposited Hillingdon Unitary Development Plan are addressed to the Council of the London Borough of Hillingdon. I would be pleased to provide a copy of the objections made by my right hon. Friend, but the approach in the first place should be to the Council."

I have obtained a copy through other sources and I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Minister with responsibility for London for their assiduous efforts to ensure that the interests of my constituents were safeguarded.

My hon. Friend the Minister continues:

"We encourage local authorities to meet with objectors to discuss objections."

There have been no such effective meetings as yet, although on occasions there has been a dialogue of the deaf in the Ruislip-Northwood forum and elsewhere, but no proper reasoned dialogue.

"These informal meetings are helpful, not least to consider how the plan might be changed to meet the objections. Officials in the Government Office for London and those from Hillingdon have met recently to pursue the objections made by my right hon Friend. Further discussion is likely once Hillingdon's response to the objections they have received is known."

In those circumstances, it is clear that Hillingdon borough council should act democratically and rescind its proposed changes to the draft unitary development plan. At the least, it should initiate a public inquiry, with an inspector appointed by the Secretary of State. Following the inspector's report to the local authority, the Secretary of State could either direct appropriate modifications to the unitary development plan or call it in for his decision in its entirety.

My view is that the Labour Hillingdon borough council, which has clearly learnt nothing from the bad old days of socialist municipal vandalism at the hands of Alderman Bartlett 20 years ago, should waste no more council tax payers' money on proposals that have no public support, and should withdraw them totally at its unitary development plan sub-committee meeting on Thursday 21 November.

I reiterate my gratitude to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the House for allowing me to bring the matters to your attention. They may appear parochial, but they raise issues of national importance and planning questions of the utmost significance to my constituents.

It must be borne in mind that constituencies such as mine and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Uxbridge and for Hayes and Harlington are under special developmental pressure. I mentioned the horrendous application by Warner Brothers to build a theme park and film studios in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge. It would have a crucial knock-on effect in my constituency. On top of that pressure we have the expansion of the motorway network and, of course, the potential fifth terminal at Heathrow airport.

The maintenance of pleasant residential areas, where it is possible to live happily and harmoniously in a balanced environment, is a crucial policy for any responsible local authority, which ours clearly is not. Luckily, it is a policy that I know that the Government support and that has received effective backing, throughout his tenure of office, from my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for London.

1.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) on securing this debate. He has received support from my hon. Friends the Members for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) and for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks), and they are a formidable team. As has been pointed out, the proposed changes to Hillingdon's draft unitary development plan have caused considerable anxiety to the constituents of all three of my hon. Friends, and they have assiduously pursued those concerns.

The development plan—the unitary development plan in the case of Hillingdon—should under normal circumstances provide for rational and consistent decisions, and should give greater certainty about where new development will be permitted. In permitting plans, the right balance must be struck between the demand for development and the protection of the environment. In that way, plans have a key role to play in contributing to the Government's strategy for sustainable development. Plans help to provide for necessary development, but development should be sought only in locations that do not compromise the needs of future generations.

It is right that anyone with an interest in their area and the way it will develop in the future should participate in the preparation of the plan and help to influence the emerging proposals. Indeed, an objective of the plan-led system is to secure public involvement in shaping local planning policies.

More than two thirds of the London boroughs will have adopted plans by the end of the year. Until Hillingdon published its package of proposed modifications, it looked as if it too would be able to adopt its plan by the end of this year. Hillingdon has already taken its plan to public inquiry. The inspector's report recommended modifications to the plan where the modification would provide a definite improvement.

However, Hillingdon's modifications go further. They are numerous and complex. Several are at variance with the inspector's recommendations, and some modifications bring forward new proposals. While there may be occasions when local reasons support disagreement with an inspector's recommendation, the expectation is that authorities will wish to accept the inspector's recommendations in most cases.

Given what is included in Hillingdon's proposed modifications, the borough cannot be surprised to have received so many objections. I understand that it has received 4,000 or more, the majority relating to the proposals for affordable housing on the Field End and Sidmouth drive recreation grounds.

The modifications are controversial in other ways. For example, there are proposals that affect the metropolitan green belt and metropolitan open land, including proposals for housing. There are also changes in the designation of open areas currently identified as forming part of the green chains that my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood mentioned. It is fair to say that we would prefer to let local authorities get on with their plan-making. However, we will object where the plan is at odds with national or regional policies without good reason, or where it is so technically defective that it could cause great difficulties to users later.

[Sir Paul Beresford]

As my hon. Friend has already mentioned, we have objected to several of the modifications proposed by Hillingdon. We have objected to significant changes to the green belt and metropolitan open land. Our policy is clear: the essential characteristic of green belts is their longevity. Their protection must be maintained as far as can be seen ahead. Our planning policy guidance note on green belts—PPG2—advises that, once green belt boundaries have been defined, they should be altered only in exceptional circumstances.

Sir Michael Shersby: Does my hon. Friend agree that another principal aspect of green belt policy is the openness of land? So many people forget that openness is a key factor and that it needs to be borne in mind. Without openness, we have urban sprawl, we have development, we have towns joining together and we lose the benefit of living in a balanced, decent community.

Sir Paul Beresford: You can see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that my hon. Friend is well versed in green belt matters. As president of the London green belt group, he makes his expertise clear.

As my hon. Friends are aware, the principles of control over development in the green belt also apply to metropolitan open land. Other proposals brought forward by the Hillingdon modifications are clearly of local concern but do not necessarily raise issues that would warrant an objection from us. The changes to the proposed green chains are an example.

Although the modifications affecting the Field End and Sidmouth Drive recreation grounds were part of a proposed green chain, they raise different issues. Here Hillingdon has proposed to build on the recreation grounds. Open space and playing fields will be lost. I am not entirely sure how much open space or how many playing fields will be lost, because Hillingdon council has not made the modifications clear.

Strategic guidance looks to the boroughs to maintain and enhance the quality of all London's open spaces, particularly our parks. We expect to see policies in UDPs for the protection of open spaces. Our planning policy guidance for sport and recreation—PPG17—makes it clear that all playing fields are of special significance and that, if they are not required for their original purpose, they may be able to meet the growing need for recreational land in the wider community. Our expectation is that playing fields will normally be protected.

For these reasons, we objected to the modifications affecting the recreation grounds. Frankly, we also needed to object because what was proposed was far from clear. We do not know how much open space will be lost, how much development is proposed or whether it is necessary—in other words, the sort of questions that my hon. Friends and their constituents are asking.

It is apparent that local people feel strongly that a further UDP inquiry is warranted. In the first place, this is for Hillingdon to consider, but we have advised planning authorities that a further inquiry will be necessary where objections to modifications raise issues that were not examined at an earlier stage.

I understand that Hillingdon officers are preparing a report for their members' committee meeting to be held on 21 November, which my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood mentioned. I anticipate that the report will set out the options on the way forward—including, we hope, a further local inquiry.

I urge my hon. Friends—although I realise that I do not need to urge them—to continue to press their concerns with the local authority. We will keep a close eye on the plan and pursue our objections until we are satisfied that the proposals do not conflict with our policy guidance. It is, of course, too early to consider whether intervention in the plan is warranted. We must first wait to see what else emerges from Hillingdon's consideration of the objections that it has received. I hope that the council is receptive and responsive.

It being seven minutes to Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Unemployed People (Work Schemes)

1. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will introduce a scheme to enable unemployed people to be given work at a minimum of £160 per week on environment, transport, community care and educational schemes; and if she will make a statement. [2070]

The Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): Our policies help unemployed people take the real jobs that the economy is creating. The approach is working: employment has risen by 210,000 in the past year and we are constantly developing new approaches to maximise our programmes' effectiveness.

Mr. Wigley: I am disappointed at, if not surprised by, the Minister's response. I warmly welcome the fall in unemployment which was announced today, but even if every vacant job were filled, there would still be more than 80,000 people unemployed in Wales and more than 1.7 million unemployed in the United Kingdom. Would it not make better sense to pay those people to do the worthwhile work that needs to be done in terms of the environment, community care, transport and all the other sectors in which jobs are not necessarily provided by the free market, rather than leaving them to rot on the dole for years until they find work again?

Mr. Forth: No, not in the absolute sense that the hon. Gentleman suggests. There is a divide here between those who believe in a general make-work scheme, where the taxpayer pays people to do what is regarded as useful across the nation, and those who believe in a more targeted approach, where we try in different ways to find what works in helping the long-term unemployed get back to work, including giving them useful work experience. If at the same time they can do useful work in local communities, that is all well and good, and our project work programme has demonstrated that that is possible. The difference is between those who believe in a blanket, unquestioning approach and those who believe in a targeted approach, and I think ours is the better.

Home-school Contracts

2. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received on the introduction of home–school contracts for all schools. [2071]

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I have received a variety of representations about home-school agreements.

Mr. Hardy: Although it appears that the Government are beginning to move along the road down which the Labour party has pointed for some time, will the Minister assure the House that she will not adopt the approach in order to pursue selection any further? Does she recognise that the value of the approach could be considerable? Will she assist local authorities to secure the resources to allow it to be effective?

Mrs. Shephard: Many schools will find such agreements to be a useful part of their policies for strengthening parental support and involvement. As many authorities and schools already have such arrangements, I see no need for extra resources.

Mr. Pawsey: Does my right hon. Friend welcome the Opposition's conversion to the policies of this Government, policies that will do much to help improve the quality and standards of state education? Will she confirm that it will be up to individual schools to decide what actually goes into the home-school contracts and that, if people want a particular contract to refer to the disciplinary measures that a school wishes to introduce, that will be quite in order?

Mrs. Shephard: My hon. Friend is ingenious, as ever; indeed, his ingenuity matches his common sense. The content of home-school agreements would certainly be up to individual admission authorities, be they local education authorities or schools. However, the Bill will include a power for the Secretary of State to rule out particular conditions.

Unemployment Statistics

3. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the reliability of the unemployment statistics in informing her Department's policy decisions. [2072]

Mr. Forth: I have total confidence in the statistics produced here by the Office for National Statistics, in Luxembourg by the European Commission and in Paris by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, all of which show that our unemployment rate is among the lowest in Europe and falling.

Mr. Clapham: Is the Minister aware that the Government have changed the method of measuring unemployment 32 times since 1979 and that that has been done to fiddle the figures? If he has such confidence in the statistics, can he confirm that, since 1992, the utilities—gas, water, electricity and telecommunications—have lost 89,743 jobs and have made £33 billion? Does that not support the case for a windfall tax and should not the utilities be encouraged to create jobs rather than lose them?

Mr. Forth: I am in the fortunate position of not needing to fiddle the figures, because unemployment is in any case falling, by any measure. I regret to say that the hon. Gentleman was not listening to what I said: I said that not only our figures but those—no doubt beloved of Opposition Members—produced by the European Commission in Luxembourg, no less, show that unemployment is low and falling. The Eurostat figures released yesterday demonstrate that fact yet again. The International Labour Organisation—also much admired by Opposition Members—has verified the fact that our unemployment rate is now significantly lower than those

of our major European competitors and that unemployment is falling here and rising in the other countries.

Sir Michael Neubert: Are not today's unemployment figures, the best for five and a half years, directly attributable to the policy of the Department for Education and Employment, and a credit to it? What assessment has my hon. Friend made of the effect on the unemployment statistics of a national minimum wage, compulsory paternity leave, compulsory consultation, a maximum working week and a minimum annual leave requirement? All those burdens on business are espoused and supported by the Labour party.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, because he has gone to the heart of the argument about what creates jobs. I believe that we can clearly demonstrate that the creation of jobs by the private sector is due entirely to the provision of an environment in which business can succeed, inward investment can be attracted and employers and employees can work out the best arrangements for conducting their business. The mindless regulatory approach that is all too common among many of our competitors and partners in the European Union would threaten all that. That is why the Government will continue to resist any attempt to impose unnecessary restrictions and regulations on our business sector, which is demonstrating a unique capacity to create real jobs.

Mr. Don Foster: I welcome today's unemployment figures, but does the Minister agree that he should not make too large a claim for Government policies because, based on the statistics that he has said are so reliable, it is clear that the vast majority of new jobs being created are part time and temporary? Analysis of his figures shows that there has been a reduction of 400,000 full-time equivalent jobs over the past 12 months.

Mr. Forth: Try telling that to the people of France, Germany, Spain and Italy, who would be pathetically grateful for job creation such as we have had here and whose Governments are doing them a gross disservice by the policies that they are pursuing. The hon. Gentleman does not have to take my word for it: the OECD, the International Monetary Fund and all the respected international authorities will confirm that the United Kingdom has found the answer to the needs of a modern, competitive economy while other countries, regrettably, are going in completely the wrong direction.

Mr. Thomason: Has my hon. Friend formed any view on the reliability of the unemployment statistics for Germany, France, Italy and some other European countries to which he referred, which demonstrate that Britain has a far lower rate of unemployment? In addition, has my hon. Friend any views on why Britain might be producing such good results?

Mr. Forth: If one looks simply at the statistics produced by, for example, the ILO or Eurostat, which produced its latest figures just yesterday, quite apart from our internal figures, one can see that on a comparative basis even they demonstrate that unemployment in France, Germany and Italy is high and rising, whereas in Britain it is low and falling. Those are incontrovertible facts measured by the ILO and Eurostat. The reason for that can now be seen clearly in the difference in approach and policy between the British Government and other Governments on the continental mainland. That is the nub of the argument about, for example, the 48-hour directive. It is also the reason for the allegations of cover-ups in the Commission of information that would seem to justify the policies that we have been pursuing, which I guess is why they have not made the public domain.

Mr. Byers: Will the Minister confirm that, on his own figures, one in five households of working age have no one in a job and that 2,750,000 men of working age without a job simply do not appear in today's unemployment figures? How much of today's apparent cut in unemployment is due not to people going into work but simply to people moving from one benefit to another?

Mr. Forth: Probably about 15,000.

Mr. Marland: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, in the United Kingdom, more people are in work and fewer people are out of work than in any other European country, and that that is due in no small measure to the fact that we have no social chapter and no minimum wage?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point, because it gives the lie to the remarkable contortions that Opposition Members go through to produce something resembling bad news about what is happening on our labour and employment front. I am glad to say that Britain has produced the capacity to provide more work for people who want it than most of our European competitors and partners. That is something in which we can take satisfaction. We shall continue to provide the environment in which business can prosper, inward investment can take place and employers and employees can work out their own arrangements, to maximise employment in Britain.

Youth Training Scheme

4. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations she has received on the effectiveness of the youth training scheme. [2073]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. James Paice): The Department has recently received many representations as part of a public consultation on the future of youth training as recommended by Sir Ron Dearing in his review of 16-to-19 qualifications.

Mr. Rooney: The Minister will be aware that some 50 per cent. of trainees fail to complete their youth training course. It is now 10 years since the rate for 17-year-olds and eight years since the rate for 16-year-olds was increased. Would not a review of training allowances encourage people to stay longer in the training scheme?

Mr. Paice: The figure for the number of leavers is open to confusion because it includes those who leave one scheme to re-enrol on another. They are classified as

leavers even if they go on to complete a second scheme that proves more to their liking. Therefore, that is not an accurate figure to quote.

We have always made it clear that the allowances are minimums. Roughly a third of people on the youth training programme are regarded as employees on a wage agreed with their employer, another third receive significant top-up payments from the training provider or the business with which they are associated, and the other third are on the basic rate. But, as we have always said, that figure is kept under review.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Is it not encouraging that the number of young people aged 16 and 17 who have completed their compulsory education and are in training or full-time education has risen from 71 per cent. only 10 years ago to 84 per cent. today? Is that not significant in respect of what the Government are doing and very encouraging for our young people who have to compete in the modern world?

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Those figures represent a dramatic increase in participation in all sorts of learning, both in full-time education and in training.

Mr. Blunkett: And in training!

Mr. Paice: The barracking from hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench is interesting—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire): They are not listening.

Mr. Paice: I think that they are listening because, interestingly, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) is denigrating the fact that some of those people are in training and not in full-time education. He obviously believes that it is somehow better to be in full-time education than in training. I have to tell him that, if he talks to business men, he will hear that they often find it much better to have a young person in their business—perhaps on a modern apprenticeship programme—who is learning on the job. They are just as capable of developing qualifications in that way and that is why my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) was entirely right to draw our attention to those figures.

Training and Business Organisation Mergers

5. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her Department's policy towards the merging of TECs, business links and local chambers of commerce. [2074]

Mr. Paice: The Government support such mergers where this is the wish of all the local partners concerned.

Ms Lynne: The Minister is aware of the proposed merger between Rochdale chamber of commerce and Rochdale training and enterprise council, incorporating business link and the enterprise trust. Does he agree that, although Rochdale already has an excellent record on exports, that merger can only improve the situation and build on our very good record on manufacturing industry in the borough?

Mr. Paice: There have already been nine such mergers and, in most cases, they are delivering the benefits to which the hon. Lady referred. I am, indeed, aware that Rochdale TEC, the local chamber of commerce and other organisations are considering a merger and I congratulate them on the fact that they are consulting widely at this stage, before formulating any proposals to the Government. If that leads to a proposition to the Government for approval for a merger, I shall, of course, bear the hon. Lady's points in mind.

Mr. Brooke: In the context of the merger of the central London TECs, to what extent has my hon. Friend received intimations of the relative underfunding of the London TECs compared with those in the rest of the country? Would it be sensible to make representations to him, rather than to anyone else?

Mr. Paice: I obviously find it difficult to accept my right hon. Friend's use of the term "underfunding" in relation to London TECs—the London TECs are funded on the same principle as TECs throughout the country and that is not a level of underfunding that I understand. If my right hon. Friend has particular concerns, the first place to which he should take them, together with the merged Centec organisation, is the Government office for London, which apportions funding between all the London TECs. I am sure he understands that, if he would like to see me about it, I should be delighted to talk to him.

Mr. Sheerman: Is not the Minister's pathetically timid response—*[Interruption.]* We will probably have to use the word "pathetically" all the time this afternoon. Is it not a fact that the Deputy Prime Minister has consistently said—using much stronger language than the Minister—that he wants vigorously to encourage those mergers up and down the country as a positive part of the Government's policy? That pathetically timid response does not square with that attitude.

Mr. Paice: The hon. Gentleman will find that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, under whose auspices the competitiveness White Papers are published, has said exactly this: that where there is clear local demand for a merger and partners come forward, the Government support the merger.

Mr. Sheerman: It is on record.

Mr. Paice: It is also on record that we have an on-going evaluation process of the nine mergers that have already taken place. We believe that, at this stage, it would be premature for the Government actively to promote mergers, but we are quite pleased and delighted to see them when they come forward based on local initiatives.

Mr. Waterson: Is my hon. Friend aware of how successful has been the merger between the Sussex TEC and chamber? Is he aware of the tremendous boost given to local business people in my constituency yesterday,

when we had the privilege of a visit by the Deputy Prime Minister, who gave his support to the local business partnership?

Mr. Paice: I am aware of the success of the Sussex merger which my hon. Friend described. I was not aware that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister was there, but I am delighted to hear that he was. As has already been said, I am sure that he will have been pleased to see the success there, as we have seen it elsewhere. I have no doubt that such mergers will continue to take place elsewhere.

Assisted Places Scheme

6. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much money has been spent on the assisted places scheme since its inception. [2075]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan): Over the 15 years since it started in 1981, we have spent just over £800 million on the assisted places scheme in England. This has helped over 80,000 able children, four fifths currently from families below the national average income.

Mr. Canavan: Will the Minister now tell us the whole truth, which is that, if we include the Scottish and Welsh expenditure, the assisted places scheme has cost the taxpayer more than £1.1 billion? That money has been used to subsidise private fee-paying schools when it could and should be spent on deprived local education authority schools which educate the overwhelming majority of children.

Mrs. Gillan: First, after his years of experience in the House, the hon. Gentleman should know that matters concerning Wales and Scotland should be addressed to my right hon. and hon. Friends in those Departments. If he thinks about it, he will see that, even in England, if we have spent about £300 billion on education over the past 15 years, the amount that we have spent on the assisted places scheme is considerably less than 0.5 per cent. The assisted places are good value for money—far better value for money than schools such as Hackney Downs.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Is my hon. Friend aware—I know that several of her right hon. and hon. Friends are—of the cruel and cynical decision by the Lib-Lab coalition that now runs Lincolnshire county council to abolish the county assisted places schemes for the Stamford endowed schools? That leaves a population of 20,000 in the town of Stamford without any sixth form for children whose parents cannot afford to pay fees. Does my hon. Friend agree that a vicious and ideologically inspired decision such as that is a frightening foretaste of what would happen to the country if a Labour or Lib-Lab Government came to power after the next election?

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend is right to draw this matter to the attention of the House. Yet again, we have evidence of another reduction of choice perpetrated by the Opposition on the parents of children.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Given the extraordinary figure of £1.1 billion spent on the assisted places scheme, will the hon. Lady confirm that 32 per cent. of primary school pupils in the maintained sector—1.3 million children—are in classes of more than 30? Is it not a national disgrace that, while they are languishing in those over-size classes, the money is being spent as a subsidy in the private sector? Does the hon. Lady agree with her hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden), who said that there are two things wrong with the assisted places scheme—its principle and its practice?

Mrs. Gillan: Once again, we are privileged to hear the hon. Gentleman, who seems to have lost not only his moustache but his sense of humour. One needs a sense of humour to listen to the same old rubbish that is peddled by the hon. Gentleman time after time. People know that the assisted places scheme is good value for money. It offers opportunity to the most able pupils from the least well-off families. Indeed, 40 per cent. of the pupils in the scheme come from families with an income below £9,873.

That attitude is a bit rich, because more than 20 Labour Members went to independent schools such as Eton, Winchester and Fettes. They now have a policy that would deny children from less well-off families the ability to attend good independent schools. It is the politics of envy at its worst.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Further to her last answer, does my hon. Friend agree that the assisted places scheme gives a chance to bright youngsters who have the misfortune to live in Labour-controlled local education authorities? They have a chance to escape from those areas, as did the children of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). They can have a decent education and a good start in life, which they would never get under Labour.

Mrs. Gillan: As usual, my hon. Friend is in fine form, and makes a good point full of common sense. The scheme widens the educational opportunities of able children from less well-off families, and gives them a choice of an education that they would not otherwise have had. That is why in the Education Bill we propose an expansion of the scheme to include preparatory schools. That paves the way for more choice for parents.

Personal and Social Education

7. **Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on her plans for the development of personal and social education. [2076]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Personal and social education is firmly established in schools and backed by statute. The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority is consulting on ways of supporting schools and teachers in that work.

Mr. Howarth: While in no way depreciating the importance of academic excellence, may I put it to the Secretary of State that the national curriculum, as it has developed, is now designed almost soley to equip young people for the competitive rat race? Does she accept that other values also matter in education, and does she regret, as I do, that the Government did not previously make

personal and social education a statutory requirement? Does she agree that all schools should have at the heart of their mission the education of young people in personal and social responsibility?

Mrs. Shephard: To reassure the hon. Gentleman, I can tell him that schools do a great deal of good work in personal, social and health education. To reassure him further, I point out that that work is subject to regular inspection by the Office for Standards in Education. The standard of work done by schools can be made known to parents, and to people in the wider community. Ofsted inspectors must report on pupils' behaviour in and around schools, and consider whether they form constructive relationships with one another and with teachers and other adults.

The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority is undertaking consultation—of which we all know—to see whether those aspects of education could be strengthened in the national curriculum, which is currently being revised.

Mr. Bellingham: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, had the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) had a more fulfilling personal and social education, he might not have had the mid-life crisis that has led to the eccentricity that he has displayed in the past year?

Madam Speaker: Order. That is not the right form of parliamentary question. Questions should deal with Government policy.

Mr. Gunnell: What will it do for children's personal and social development if the Secretary of State's colleagues, with her apparent support, introduce into schools legalised physical violence, which I regard as physical child abuse?

Mrs. Shephard: The provisions on discipline that the Government have included in the Education Bill are what teachers have asked for. I have made it clear to the House on a number of occasions that teachers have not asked for the return of corporal punishment, and the Government do not propose to include that in the Bill.

General National Vocational Qualifications

8. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the impact of GNVQs on educational standards. [2077]

Mr. Paice: GNVQs are having a remarkable impact on the motivation of young people of all abilities, and we are now building on their early success.

Mr. Lidington: I invite my hon. Friend to visit Buckinghamshire to see for himself that the introduction of GNVQs in schools in my constituency has increased student motivation and students' levels of achievement. Does he agree that the increasing success of GNVQs should be a source of pride for the students and teachers directly concerned, for Buckinghamshire local education authority, which has strongly supported the introduction of GNVQs, and for the Government, who introduced the qualification in the first place?

Mr. Paice: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the invitation, and I shall accept it if I possibly can.

I agree with my hon. Friend on GNVQs. Anyone who has been to schools and spoken to students of different ages who are undertaking a GNVQ can only be excited about the motivation of those students. Many of them admit to having been turned off by the more formal approach to education, and are finding that the approach adopted in the GNVQ process gives them an exciting chance to continue learning. That is what it is all about, and why the Government are proud of the development of GNVQs, which have enabled many young people to continue learning who might otherwise have been discouraged from gaining further qualifications. That is the objective of all of us.

Mr. Bryan Davies: The reforms of GNVQs are welcome and long overdue, but is it not clear that the Government's promotion of grammar schools and small sixth forms in grant-maintained schools run counter to the development of vocational education? It widens the gap between academic and vocational education at just the time when we should be seeking to bridge that gap.

Mr. Paice: That is a non sequitur. The whole purpose of establishing a range of different schools, each specialising in a different approach, is to enable young people and their parents to choose what is best for their personal needs. I know of many schools with very high academic achievements, which have always produced good A-level results and which have gone out and grasped GNVQs, seeing them as a sensible and, indeed, essential system to run alongside A-levels. Nothing in the Bill or the Government's proposals would in any way reduce young people's opportunity to choose the qualifications that are most appropriate to their needs.

Teaching Methods

9. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the teaching skills and methods employed in schools. [2078]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire): The Government are determined to ensure that all teachers use effective teaching methods to raise standards, particularly in basic literacy and numeracy.

Lady Olga Maitland: Given that trendy teaching methods, together with political correctness, are the principal cause of appalling results in some schools—mainly those in the bottom 10 local education authorities, which are controlled by Labour—what steps will the Minister take to root out such methods?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend is aware of several of the steps that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already announced. It is, of course, regrettable that any teaching method should depend on passing fashion, and she rightly criticises some now obsolete fashions. The

reforms that we have introduced give greater accountability to heads and governors to enable them to tackle any teachers who are currently under-performing, and the emphasis on standards should enable most of those teachers to improve. I expect—and, indeed, parents expect—the minority of teachers who are not performing adequately, and cannot improve, to be shown the door and given the chance to work in a less challenging environment.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Is the Minister aware that the proportion of teachers who use information technology as part of their classroom teaching has remained constant for the past two years? What is he going to do to improve teachers' confidence in such technology, and to ensure that the outdated computers in classrooms are replaced as soon as possible?

Mr. Squire: This country has one of the finest records in supplying information technology to schools. We were in there first, and our investment bears comparison with that of any other country. As for the specific question of teacher confidence, the hon. Lady knows that information technology is now one of the cross-curriculum requirements. More and more teachers are required to be adept in its use. It features heavily in on-course in-set training, and it is also being given more attention in initial training.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: May I suggest to my hon. Friend that, following reform of the structure of education and the introduction of a national curriculum and testing, teaching methods and skills are now the crux of the modern education debate? Will he give every support to the Office for Standards in Education, enabling it to take a rational view about which methods work and which fail? Is there not ample evidence to show that some of the trendier "group learning situations" constructed by education thinkers of the 1960s and 1970s have been an utter failure? There is now cross-party support behind the party-political battle; those methods must be rooted out, and teachers must undertake proper instruction rather than simply waiting for children to pick up the skills that they need.

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In particular, he is right to stress that teaching is about giving instruction, not just about allowing pupils to discover themselves. The emphasis today in teaching, particularly in initial teacher training, is to ensure that all teachers coming into our schools should acquire a range of skills and the ability to determine when it is appropriate to use them. We are determined that all teachers will reach that target.

Job Insecurity

10. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to introduce measures to reduce job insecurity. [2079]

Mr. Forth: The best protection against job insecurity is sustained economic growth and increased competitiveness. We will continue the policies that have resulted in the economy growing for more than three years, unemployment falling by more than 908,000 since the recovery began and the number of jobs rising by more than 210,000 in the past year.

Mr. Winnick: Is it not a commentary on this wretched Government that, since the Prime Minister was appointed just six years ago, nearly 11 million people have experienced some form of unemployment and, moreover, that there are 1 million fewer jobs in the economy than in 1990? Therefore, is it not justified that the next round of job losses will be those of quite a few Tory Members of Parliament?

Mr. Forth: Labour Members are so desperate about the regular and persistent fall in unemployment that they have to scratch around for such odd figures. If 300,000 people enter and leave the job register every month, as they do now and as they have for many years, of course we can identify many people who, from time to time, will both have lost jobs and, happily, gained jobs. Statistics show that, for men and women, average job tenure is little different from that 10 years ago, so the myth that Labour Members feel obliged to peddle about job insecurity is simply their desperate response to the heartening and continuing fall in unemployment.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, since 1992, there has been a drop of some 750,000 in the number of people unemployed? Will he compare that drop with the increases in unemployment in Germany, France and other countries that follow the policies peddled by the Labour party? Does he agree that the greatest threat to job security is the introduction of a national minimum wage and the social chapter, which Labour would introduce?

Mr. Forth: Indeed. It must be one of the great puzzles of today's political scene that the Labour party espouses and seems to find attractive all the policies that emanate from continental Europe—and have failed almost every country in continental Europe. If Labour Members cared as much as they claim to about jobs and employment, would they not doubt that, if they introduced the social chapter and the minimum wage, the risk would be, that unemployment here would rise to the level in countries that are pursuing those policies? It is not a risk that I would want to take.

Mr. Hain: The millions of people who are trapped in job insecurity are certainly not pathetically grateful to the Government. Indeed, they will give them a real caning at the next general election. The Minister says that job insecurity is a myth. Is he aware that Government figures show that more than half the people who leave a job for the dole are out of work again in under a year? The new Tory world of work is insecure, short term, temporary and casual. Is he also aware that, instead of indulging in playground politics in Europe, people want him to tackle insecurity at home?

Mr. Forth: On behalf of many of my hon. Friends, may I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the caning tendency? I am sure that he will be a most welcome addition.

It simply will not do for Labour Members to think that, if they keep talking about job insecurity frequently enough, they will somehow increase the feeling of

insecurity outside the House. It is dishonest for politicians to try to scare the electorate with repeated talk about such things as job insecurity. The figures that I have given do not support such talk. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will look more seriously at their own policies, because if anything will increase job insecurity in the future, it is Labour party policy.

Legislation

11. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many Bills on education matters have been introduced by her Department or its predecessor since 1979. [2080]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My Department has introduced 20 Bills relating to education since 1979.

Mr. Skinner: Would it be fair to say that, after 17 Tory years, the Government are now introducing education Bills that partly repeal the Bills they introduced in the 1979 to 1984 period? The Tories have turned full circle. When they first started, they were in favour of abolishing grammar schools, but now they want to create them; they were in favour of getting rid of the cane, but now Miss Whiplash wants to bring it back. All the time, teachers are falling down the pay ladder and more than 1 million primary kids are in classes of more than 30. We need about £4 billion to be spent on schools to bring them up to a decent standard of repair, but the Tories took away £50-odd billion from local authorities—mainly Labour ones—in the form of grant, most of which should have been spent on education.

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman's rant does very little credit to his grammar school education. Perhaps I can point out to him that our reforms have resulted in higher standards, more choice, more transparency and more accountability in the education system. I should have thought that it was a matter of shame that the Labour party has voted against measures that resulted in those improvements.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Would my right hon. Friend like to remind the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) that education is a dynamic science that constantly changes? It is therefore essential to keep on introducing new Bills to keep abreast of new developments. Bearing in mind what my right hon. Friend said about no teacher organisations making representations for the return of moderate and reasonable corporal punishment in schools, would she accept such representations from present or former individual members of the profession?

Mrs. Shephard: I agree with my hon. Friend that if the Opposition were so concerned about education they could start by looking at the records of their political colleagues in local education authorities throughout the land. It is a matter of great regret that they have voted against parental choice, more information about schools and admission arrangements, and even against the inspection of schools. Their attitude really defies description.

Primary School Class Sizes

13. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children of primary schools are currently in classes of more than 30 pupils. [2083]

Mr. Robin Squire: In January 1996, 32 per cent. of primary pupils were in single-teacher classes of more than 30. About a third of those pupils were in classes supported by at least one member of non-teaching staff.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Minister agree that those figures are outrageous and disgraceful, and that standards in our primary schools have got worse and worse in the past 17 years with more and more pupils in large classes in which it is obviously difficult to give them the proper support and tuition that they need? Will he tell us about his plans for the future, because all the estimates I have seen suggest that more and more children will be in classes of more than 30 pupils, and will therefore get a worse and worse education? Will he tell us what plans he has to ensure a proper supply of properly qualified and trained teachers? What are his plans for proper expenditure to ensure that school buildings are of a sufficient standard to accommodate more, smaller classes, which will ensure that all our children get the standard of education that they deserve and need?

Mr. Squire: How interesting. First of all, a small fact: the percentage of pupils who are in classes of more than 30 is now smaller than it was when we came to power in 1979. I invite the hon. Gentleman to find, at some other stage, the adjective to describe our predecessors, the Labour Government. It is rather more important than that, because the hon. Gentleman comes from the borough of Islington and, indeed, represents it. In Islington, class sizes are below the national average, yet after 11 years of compulsory education, Islington's pupils have the worst record of attainment at GCSE level of any authority in the country. The Labour party has run that authority for the past 25 years. It is down to local education authorities to decide how the money is spent and what standards are maintained. Islington may be the borough of the chattering classes; unfortunately, it is also the borough of failing classes.

Sir Alan Haselhurst: Although I acknowledge that smaller class sizes must be better than larger class sizes, is not what really matters the amount of attention that each child gets from the teacher and support staff in the classroom, and the quality of the teaching?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend—who is very experienced in these matters—is absolutely right. If there were any doubt about that fact even among Opposition Members, the events of the past year should have disabused them of their belief, to which they adhere fanatically, that class size is all. The pupil-teacher ratio at Hackney Downs was eight to one, and the ratio at the Ridings school was 15 to one. Reports from the three inner-London education authorities earlier this year showed that four out of 10 of their 11-year-olds were two or more years behind the reading age for an 11-year-old. That is disgraceful, but it is not due to class sizes.

Mr. Bayley: If the Minister genuinely agrees with the hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir A. Haselhurst) that

smaller classes provide a better education than bigger classes, will the Government match the Labour party's commitment to cut class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds to a maximum of 30?

Mr. Squire: For a start, the Labour party has not even begun to find the money—which may be as much as £250 million—to meet that pledge. No one is saying that class size is not important. [HON. MEMBERS: "You are."] No. The Labour party, however, says that it is the single most important issue, which is manifestly untrue. This year and next year, there will undoubtedly be parents in the hon. Gentleman's constituency who will have a choice about which school to send their children to. They will sometimes choose the school that has larger classes and is more popular, and reject the school—which may even be closer—with smaller classes. All the evidence suggests that the belief that the issue is all about class size is simply wrong.

Schools (Examination Results)

14. **Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many (a) grant-maintained and (b) local education authority schools are represented in the top 50 state schools measured by A-level results. [2084]

Mrs. Gillan: The 1995 school performance tables show that 32 of the top 50 schools in England measured by A-level results were grant maintained and 18 were local education authority maintained.

Mrs. Peacock: Does my hon. Friend agree that A-level results show that GM schools enhance our children's education? Will she also confirm that the Labour party's policy would do great damage to our children's education?

Mrs. Gillan: Yes; I have great pleasure in confirming what my hon. Friend says. Overall, pupils in grant-maintained schools taking two or more A-levels achieve a higher average point score, at 17.1, than LEA pupils, at 15.5. The Labour party presents the real threat to grant-maintained schools, and its continued hostility to them is paraded openly. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) and the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) should speak up, and, when next they visit the schools that their children attend, tell the head teachers of their plans to disrupt the schools and to put them under LEA control.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Minister agree that the concept of a top and a bottom in tables of attainment is meaningless compared with the absolute standards achieved by all the schools? Will she note the damage done by publication of tables, and back both the head and the parents of students at Cheltenham college, who have taken a sensible view of education—against the views of their rather narrow-minded, business-minded and statistically minded governors?

Mrs. Gillan: I thought that the hon. Gentleman's party was becoming rather keen on our performance tables, which have bedded down extremely successfully. Higher standards and better results, which is what we are now getting from our schools, are what we expect and what we have delivered in the education system.

Mr. Stephen: My hon. Friend will be aware that many of the top 50 schools—judging by A-level results—are in the private sector, where head teachers have the power to use the cane if in their professional judgment it is the right way in which to deal with a particular pupil. She may recall that, two years ago, I tabled an amendment to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill to give back that power to head teachers in the state sector, from which she may deduce that it is my personal view that head teachers in the state sector should have that power. What response has there been from parents and the general public to the current debate on the issue?

Mrs. Gillan: I am always interested, as I am sure is the whole House, to hear my hon. Friend's personal views on a wide range of subjects, which he often brings to the Floor of the House. As he knows, there have been no demands to increase the disciplinary measures that we are introducing, over and above those in the Education Bill.

Nursery Vouchers

15. **Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much she plans to spend on publicity relating to the national implementation of the nursery voucher scheme. [2085]

Mr. Robin Squire: The estimated budget for publicity about the nursery education voucher scheme in England, up to its initial implementation, is £1,900,000—or 0.25 per cent. of total estimated expenditure on the scheme. The publicity will include essential information for more than 650,000 parents and some 40,000 providers of nursery education.

Mr. Touhig: That is in addition to the £1.1 million spent on promoting the pilot scheme. Does the Minister agree that Britain's four-year-olds are more deserving of taxpayers' revenue than the advertising industry? If he does, how does he justify spending £3 million on advertising the nursery voucher scheme when that amount could provide an extra 2,500 nursery places?

Mr. Squire: The hon. Gentleman has obviously been asleep. Next year, a total of £750 million will be spent on nursery places, of which £165 million will be new money and go only into pre-school provision. To ensure that parents and, indeed, providers are able to take full advantage of the scheme, it is essential—indeed, it would be a dereliction of duty by the Government if we did not ensure it—that, as in phase 1, parents are able to see the expansion of places and the enhancement of opportunity.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my hon. Friend agree that the best way in which to publicise the great success of the nursery voucher scheme would be to ask the parents of children who have benefited from the vouchers in the pilot areas, such as Norfolk and various London boroughs, to publicise it? Will he join me in inviting the Labour party to condemn the schools in Labour and Liberal Democrat-controlled LEAs that have tried to blackmail parents by telling them that they can send their children

to the popular state schools only if they attend the authorities' nurseries, thus destroying the choice that many parents want to exercise through nursery vouchers as between state and private sector nurseries? Are not we about choice and diversity and the Opposition, as always, about trying to force parents down the state road only?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend is right in both his main points. One of many interesting statistics that were published today is the independent survey of parental opinion which shows that vouchers are popular with parents in phase 1. I have no doubt that they will be popular in phase 2. On his second point, the concern that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have about the possibility of LEAs or individual schools acting in the way he described has led to our writing a letter to every LEA reminding them that simply cramming more four-year-olds into overcrowded reception classes will not necessarily be the best way forward, and encouraging them to draw on the examples of authorities such as Shropshire, Norfolk and York, which have already recognised the advantages of partnership.

Mr. Blunkett: Was it not this Government who removed the minimum space requirements—a policy that has allegedly led to the cramming of children into reception classes? Is it not a fact that no one has ever had to advertise nursery places, only nursery vouchers? The use of £900,000 of public money on television and radio advertising out of the £3 million total budget is nothing short of a scandalous and blatant political exercise to try to win votes.

Mr. Squire: I think that the hon. Gentleman is wrong on every material particular. He is certainly wrong to suggest that the advertisements are in some way party political. *[Interruption.]* If those hon. Members who disagree had seen the advertisements, they would know that they are as party political as the weather forecast, but slightly more interesting.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) for his campaign attacking nursery vouchers. I am enormously relieved that he is giving us so much extra free publicity, reminding parents across the country what they will lose if Labour gets in at the next election.

Assisted Places Scheme

16. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many places at private schools are being financed by the assisted places scheme in the 1996–97 academic year. [2086]

Mrs. Gillan: There are 37,816 assisted places available at 355 schools in England.

Mr. Williams: There are 7 million children in schools in England and Wales. The assisted places scheme benefits only a tiny minority—less than 1 per cent. How can it be right to take resources away from the many to benefit just a few? How does that square with the Prime Minister's avowed intention of creating a classless society and opportunity for all?

Mrs. Gillan: I cannot believe that the Labour Members are still peddling their opposition to the assisted places scheme. It is extremely good value for money, as I have said many times from the Dispatch Box. The average cost of an assisted place is somewhat higher than, but of the same order as, an average maintained pupil place. The difference is not excessive. An assisted place, the average cost of which is £3,700, is better value than the cost of maintained places in authorities such as Hackney and Lambeth.

Mr. Fabricant: Is not it true that 70 per cent. of those going into secondary education with the assisted places scheme come from maintained primary schools? It is simple arithmetic that, if they were not going to private schools with the assisted places scheme, their education would have to be funded by local education authorities. Is it not about time that the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) put his short trousers back on, went back to school and learnt some basic arithmetic?

Mrs. Gillan: We want to spare you the sight of the hon. Member for Carmarthen in short trousers, Madam Speaker. My hon. Friend is right. Nearly 70 per cent. of pupils on the assisted places scheme come from maintained primary schools.

The most important fact about the scheme is that 40 per cent. of the assisted pupils come from families with a total annual income lower than £9,874. Some 80 per cent. come from families with an income lower than the national average. Labour Members want to take away that opportunity for children from poor families. They should be ashamed of continuing to peddle their disgraceful policy.

17. **Mr. Pearson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children from Dudley metropolitan borough are currently being educated at schools through the assisted places scheme. [2087]

Mrs. Gillan: Information about the local education authority area from which assisted pupils originate is not collected centrally.

Mr. Pearson: Is it not unjust and unfair that the Government are prepared to shell out millions of pounds to provide elitist private education to a handful of children in Dudley when 4,500 five, six and seven-year-olds in the borough's cash-strapped schools are suffering in class sizes of 30 or more? Does not new Labour's pledge to cut class sizes for youngsters show which party really cares about educational opportunities for all?

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Gentleman had better check up. This is not new Labour, but old Labour. This is the politics of envy. This is the Labour party that says to poor families, "Your children are not going to be allowed to have the chance that our children have had or we have had." The hon. Gentleman should look closely at the assisted places scheme, at the value for money it offers and at the results achieved by the pupils. He should recognise that it is about time the education policies of the Opposition parties started to level up rather than down.

Nursery Vouchers

18. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will visit Normanton to discuss nursery vouchers with (a) parents, (b) governors and (c) teachers. [2088]

Mr. Robin Squire: No, but my right hon. Friend and her Ministers have discussed the benefits of the nursery education voucher scheme at a number of events up and down the country.

Mr. O'Brien: That reply is obviously disappointing because parents, governors and teachers at St. John's school, and at other schools in my constituency such as Wrenthorpe and Outwood, would like the opportunity to tell the Secretary of State that they want the Government to provide more nursery places rather than spend £3 million on publicity. Parents want nursery places rather than vouchers and publicity on the issue.

Parents would also like the opportunity to tell the Secretary of State that they support Wakefield local education authority's nursery provision for three-and-a-half-year-olds and that they want nursery facilities in the area to be extended. It is disappointing that we do not have the opportunity to tell the Secretary of State exactly what people require in the areas that I represent.

Mr. Squire: The hon. Gentleman must have misheard or not heard when I said a moment ago that another £165 million will be spent—next year alone—on pre-school education. He quotes a tiny fraction of that money, which is essential expenditure on publicity, as the totality of new spend. I say to the hon. Gentleman and to other hon. Members from areas where there is currently high provision that, if the present quality of provision by local authority schools is as good as they say it is, parents will undoubtedly continue to use those facilities. If the provision is not as good as that, parents should have the choice to look elsewhere.

Opposition Day

[1st Allotted Day]

BSE Crisis

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.31 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I beg to move,

That this House notes that after the Florence European Council the Prime Minister assured the House that by October the United Kingdom should meet the conditions for the ban to be lifted on the export of beef from certified herds and certain other categories and that by November the United Kingdom should meet the conditions for the ban to be lifted on all beef that can be sold in the United Kingdom; deplores the fact that the ban on the export of United Kingdom beef remains fully in place and that Her Majesty's Government has failed to meet the conditions for it to be lifted within the timetable they themselves announced; recalls that in advance of Florence Her Majesty's Government pursued a policy of non-co-operation which led to a deterioration in relations with the other member states of the European Union, and failed to resolve the crisis for the United Kingdom's beef industry; believes that the measures adopted by Her Majesty's Government following the identification of BSE a decade ago were inadequate and enforcement was unsatisfactory; notes the confusion and delay since the House was advised on 20th March that BSE was considered the most likely cause of a new variant of CJD and the failure of Her Majesty's Government to meet its own targets for the slaughter programme; deplores the hardship and suffering caused to beef farmers and the beef industry; and regrets that Her Majesty's Government has not protected the interests of United Kingdom consumers or producers of beef.

On Monday, the House was entertained to the vision offered by the Government of a world free of trade barriers by 2020. The Foreign Secretary, in a failed attempt to capture the headlines, described this as the Government's "2020 vision". There is, of course, an unreality about a Government who have five months to run setting out their vision for 2020, but there is a wider lack of reality about a Government who have visions of free trade around the globe in the next century when they comprehensively fail to get the ban on exports of UK beef across the channel lifted.

The crisis in the beef industry since the statement of 20 March dominated the proceedings from March to June. Since the House returned, there has been no statement and no debate initiated by the Government. The only statement that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food gave the House was in response to the private notice question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang).

This is the first full day's debate on the subject, but—many hon. Members on both sides will be aware of this—the crisis caused by the statement on 20 March is still there around Britain. It is experienced by thousands of farmers, by the people who work in the industries that support farming, and by the people who work in the industries that process beef, all of whom are still living with the consequences of the statement of 20 March.

Those people might by now have expected to be out of that difficulty. They might have heard what the Prime Minister said at the victory celebrations on 24 June in this House when he returned from his triumph at Florence. In that statement, the Prime Minister assured the House that, by October, the Government would have met the conditions for lifting the ban in two stages—beef from certified herds and beef from young animals—and that, by November, the Government would have met the conditions for lifting the ban on all beef that at present is allowed to be sold only in the United Kingdom in order that it could be sold on the continent as well.

The House must agree that October has been and gone, and all those stages of the ban are still in place. Indeed, November is half over. I will cheerfully give way to any hon. Member who believes that the ban will be completely lifted in the next two weeks. Not only have the Government missed the target they set for the lifting of the ban, but I am prepared to have a small bet with any hon. Member that the Minister of Agriculture will not be able to give us the revised target for the lifting of the ban.

Before the recess, the Minister said that he hoped that the ban would be lifted completely by the back end of the year. Perhaps we should ask him what he meant by that.

Mr. Brian David Jenkins (South–East Staffordshire): Which year?

Mr. Cook: Indeed. Is December the back end of the year? Will the Minister stake what is left of his reputation that the ban will be lifted in December? If we miss December, will we not be looking down the front end of another year?

I hope that the Minister will tell his hon. Friends the truth—that he has no idea when the ban will be lifted. Far from being able to tell us when he will get agreement to lift further stages in the ban, he now cannot even tell us when he will implement the agreement that he has already secured to lift the ban on the trade in gelatine.

Conservative Members have to face the truth: that they will be fighting the general election with most of the beef ban still in place. That will lead to some interesting questions at their election meetings. The most difficult one to answer will be whatever happened to the Prime Minister's great triumph at Florence. Lifting the ban in stages was the victory of the beef war. If we take that away, what will happen to the victory?

I do not hold the Minister responsible for the beef war. He is held to account for enough without being held responsible for the beef war that he did not invent. The architect of the beef war was the Foreign Secretary, who, no doubt wisely, decided not to be here today to explain why the policy that he constructed has collapsed.

The Minister of Agriculture will recall that, last May, the Government brought in the Foreign Secretary to support him in his negotiations, because of the feeling that his diplomatic skills could be improved by assistance. The Foreign Secretary devised the policy of non-co-operation in Europe, or, as it graphically became known to diplomats, PONCE—a fitting acronym, given the posturing that it involved.

In pursuit of PONCE, the Government halted the work of the European Union by prolonged serial vetoing. They even vetoed measures that were more important to Britain than to the other member states. We blocked a measure that Britain had proposed to cut red tape. We blocked tougher powers of inspection against fraud, although Britain had lobbied for them. We blocked the sending of

[Mr. Cook]

a letter to Iran about Salman Rushdie, although the only person who could have benefited directly from it was a British citizen.

We even blocked measures of value to countries outside the European Union that had no part in our quarrel with the continent over the trade in beef. In view of the human tragedy that is currently taking place on an epic scale in Zaire, the House should recall with some sense of shame that, in June, Britain blocked a joint declaration of concern at the rising ethnic tension in that region of Africa.

There has been a cost to Britain of that sustained disruption. I shall give only one example, which illustrates the damage to our relations with Europe. Last January, the Government of Portugal brought forward a resolution in the European Union to condemn Indonesian repression in East Timor. It is a big domestic issue in Portugal, because Indonesia is a former colony and because the people of Portugal have considerable sympathy with the Catholic majority of East Timor.

The British Minister in January requested the Portuguese to withdraw the motion because, at that time, British hostages were being held in Irian Jaya and Indonesia was assisting us in the release of those hostages. It would have been a source of embarrassment for Britain were that resolution to have been pressed. Happy to help, our oldest ally withdrew the resolution.

In the spring, the hostages were released. In June, Portugal brought back its resolution on East Timor, and Britain blocked it under the policy of non-co-operation. The fury that that double-cross caused in Lisbon may partly explain the warmth with which the Prime Minister of Portugal sent a message to our party conference hoping for a change of Government at the general election.

That loss of good will might have been a price that the Government were prepared to pay, if they had won the war. All wars have casualties, and it is victory that justifies the risk of casualties. Conservative Members claimed victory. The Foreign Secretary described Florence as a turning point. The Minister of Agriculture said that it was

"a great success, and provides a solid way forward."—[*Official Report*, 24 July 1996; Vol. 282, c. 369.]

As late as 4 July, the Prime Minister was asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair):

"Does the Prime Minister still hold to November of this year as the date by which the ban will be completely lifted?"

The answer was:

"Yes".—[*Official Report*, 4 July 1996; Vol. 280, c. 1049.]

Of course, to meet that target the United Kingdom would have had to keep its side of the bargain. The most curious part of the Government's mystifying conduct over the BSE crisis is that, having hailed agreement in Florence as a victory, they then proceeded to break that agreement by not keeping their part of the bargain.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): The right hon. Gentleman talks about Britain keeping a bargain. If the Government were to introduce a selective cull to implement the Florence agreement, would the Labour party vote in favour?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the reason why the Government are terrified to introduce such a cull is that they do not know whether their Back Benchers would vote for it. If an order is tabled, we will consider the details and decide whether it will obtain our support. The hon. Gentleman can hardly ask us whether we will support the order when his Government will not even table an order for us to consider in the first place.

The Minister of Agriculture did agree to bring in a selective cull in June, presumably in the confidence that the hon. Gentleman would support him. Having introduced it in June, the Minister then dumped it in September. Shrewdly, on that occasion, his colleagues recognised that, to sell that breach of contract, he would need more help and guidance than just the Foreign Secretary. When the Minister of Agriculture went to last month's Agriculture Council, he was accompanied not just by one extra colleague but by a phalanx of five Ministers. Some were there to support him and others were there to contradict him. Yet all the Queen's Ministers could not put the Florence framework back together again.

The Minister of Agriculture has talked much, and no doubt will talk again today, about the new scientific evidence that justifies scrapping the cull—mainly the computer-modelling exercise in *Nature* magazine. But the weight that he places on that exercise is not shared by *Nature* magazine. After his decision to halt the cull, *Nature* ran a blistering editorial saying:

"The role of science is to illuminate political choices not to enforce them. By acting as if it is oblivious to this truth, and to European political reality, the UK Government can only erode its credibility still further."

Before the Minister invites the House to attach the greatest importance to scientific evidence, perhaps he also should attach the same weight to the conclusion of the same scientist, that the Minister's course of action lacks credibility and is out of touch with reality.

The truth is that it is not the scientific evidence that prompted the Government to abandon the cull but the bogus, empty nature of the agreement they reached at Florence. The Minister of Agriculture was candidly honest about that on 14 October. He told the House on 14 October that the case for the cull had diminished because

"It has become increasingly clear during the summer that the prospect of other member states agreeing to an early . . . lifting of the export ban . . . has lessened."—[*Official Report*, 14 October 1996; Vol. 282, c. 465.]

So there we have it: other member states were not going to agree to lift the ban anyway. I have to ask, how can this be? It is not what we were told was in the Florence agreement. We were told after Florence that decisions would be taken not by the Council of Ministers but by the Commission. We were told that the decision that would be taken by the Commission would be taken on scientific, not political, grounds.

The Foreign Secretary explicitly told me in response to an intervention on 20 June:

"It does not need to go before any Ministers or any Government."—[*Official Report*, 20 June 1996; Vol. 279, c. 1028.]

If that was true, how can the Minister of Agriculture now claim that the ban cannot be lifted because some Ministers and some Governments object?

Or is the truth that the Foreign Secretary has absented himself from today's debate because he knows that he has sold the House a false prospectus; that Florence did not

give us a binding framework for progress on lifting the ban; that there was no real linkage between steps that we might take and steps in lifting the ban; and that there never was any serious prospect that the ban would be lifted in October or November, as promised by the Prime Minister?

The public have a much more acute sense of the worth of the Florence agreement. After the agreement, a survey discovered that 83 per cent. of the public believed that the United Kingdom had lost the beef war, and 4 per cent. believed that the European Union had lost the beef war. Even at today's ratings in the polls, there must have been some Conservatives among the 83 per cent. who believed that Britain had lost the beef war.

Yet, breathtakingly, the Government propose to do it all over again, this time to stop the working time directive. The Prime Minister assured us yesterday that the Government would veto the intergovernmental conference unless the law was changed. We shall be treated to some more acts of PONCEing, and pretty empty PONCEing it will be, because the end of the IGC will not be until June next year, and the Prime Minister knows perfectly well that there is a pretty good chance that he will not be there in June next year.

Before I move on, I should just say that, if Conservative Members want to announce in their election addresses at the next election that the Conservative party is the party that will deny people the right to say no to excessive working hours and that will refuse parents the right to insist on holidays to spend with their children, I warn them that there is not a Labour candidate in any constituency who will not dance with delight.

In taking on Europe, the Government are condemning themselves to expose their own weakness. Conservative Members are doomed to disappointment if they think that the electors are keen to be conscripted to another war against Europe. The beef war was the first war in British history in which we picked a fight with the whole of the continent. Previous British Governments, including Conservative ones, have been sensible enough to ensure that either France or Prussia was on our side before going to war. For two centuries, Britain's advantage was held to be in finding the balance in Europe and holding the balance in Europe. Only this Government imagine that the balancing point can be found somewhere in the middle of the channel, between Britain and all the rest of Europe.

In taking on the whole of Europe, the Government have not demonstrated their strength but exposed their weakness and revealed their incompetence—the incompetence with which the Minister of Agriculture gave no prior warning to the Commission or his opposite numbers of the bombshell he dropped on 20 March on the connection between BSE and CJD. I know that the Minister rang the Agriculture Commissioner just before he came into the House on that day. I know that he advised the Agriculture Commissioner that he was sorry that he could not give him prior warning because it was a convention of the House that the House had to hear first before anyone else.

I have to tell the Minister that the Commissioner in Brussels would have found this a lot more convincing if he had not read in that morning's editions of *The Times*, The Daily Telegraph and the *Daily Mail* what the Minister was going to say in the House that afternoon. Plainly, those newspapers had been told before the House of Commons.

The Government also revealed their incompetence by promising an action plan to eradicate BSE and then turning up at the meeting with a four-page sketch that the Spanish Agriculture Minister described as "mierda"; a term which, if literally translated, I am sure you would rule unparliamentary, Madam Speaker, but which was paraphrased by *The Daily Mail* as "clearly insufficient" They showed incompetence in taking three months following the statement of 20 March—some 10 years after the identification of BSE—to produce a serious, thorough-going programme to eradicate BSE from the herds.

So inept has the Government's response been to the beef ban, a bit of me wonders if it is not just suiting them that the ban is there. The amendment accuses the Opposition of "cynical . . . opportunism". Words like "mote" and "beam" flit through my mind. I must tell the Minister that there is no worse cynical opportunism than the way in which the Government have seized on the beef ban to blame Europe for a crisis that was of their own making. Indeed, the moment of truth will come if the beef ban is lifted.

Beef sales will only recover not when Conservative Members bludgeon political leaders into lifting the ban, but when they persuade housewives in Europe to buy British beef, which they will never do by threatening a policy of non-co-operation with consumers. The amendment has the sheer gall to accuse the Opposition of ignoring

"the restoration of consumer confidence".

That amendment will be moved by the Minister of Agriculutre, the same Minister who told the House on 20 March:

"I do not believe that this information—

the information on the link between BSE and CJD—

should damage consumer confidence".—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. 387.]

I must tell the Minister that he is still out of touch with reality. The Meat and Livestock Commission reported in October that beef sales were down by 17 per cent. on last year. In Germany, sales are down by 15 per cent. and in Italy by 25 per cent.—even before those countries agree to import any British beef.

Nor is it just Europe that does not have confidence in British beef. More than 50 countries outside Europe have also banned the import of British beef, some of them countries that Conservative Members regard more warmly than Europe, where they speak foreign languages—they include the United States, Canada, Australia and South Africa.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North–West): Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that the beef ban by the European countries was justified?

Mr. Cook: As I have explained to the House, it was entirely understandable why—given the ineptness of the Government—that ban was introduced. Ever since the ban was introduced, the Opposition have offered support to the Government in their steps to remove it, even to the extent of giving them the benefit of the doubt during the beef war when they carried out the policy of non-co-operation. What we object to is the failure of the Government to achieve the measures that would lift the ban, and the way in which they deceived the House on the effect of the Florence agreement.

[Mr. Cook]

I was about to add—perhaps the hon. Member for Clwyd, North–West (Mr. Richards) will wish to ask whether this ban is justified—that even Hong Kong has banned British beef, although I keep reading that the next leader of the Conservative party may be the man who is currently the Governor of Hong Kong. If he stands, presumably, he will not get the vote of the Minister of Agriculture, who cannot even persuade Chris Patten to have confidence in British beef.

The reason why there is such difficulty in restoring international confidence in the safety of British beef is the manner in which, at every stage of the history of BSE, the Government have done as little as possible, as late as possible.

Mr. Michael Lord (Central Suffolk): The right hon. Gentleman has been asked two direct questions, neither of which he has answered. He is making a clever speech that the House is enjoying in some ways, but he is not dealing with the problems facing a major industry in this country. Does he support the slaughter of thousands of healthy animals, with no guarantee that the ban will be lifted at its end?

Mr. Cook: Hang on. We were told that the Government secured the undertaking in Florence that, if they slaughtered the animals, the ban would be lifted. The hon. Gentleman is disagreeing with those on his Front Bench, not with me. We are asking the Government why, having sold that agreement to the House, they have ratted on it.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Surely the right hon. Gentleman realises that British agriculture is facing its gravest crisis this century. Will he tell the House and the country simply and clearly whether he believes that the ban is justified?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for putting that question again. We have repeatedly said that we regard British beef as safe and that we do not accept the ban, and we have repeatedly supported the Government in all the measures that they said would lead to a lifting of the ban.

After all that support, we are told that the ban cannot be lifted in the timetable that the Government promised, partly because they have done too little, too late, to combat BSE, starting at the very beginning, with their disastrous decision on taking office not to regulate the feedstuffs industry to a higher standard, on the grounds set out in their consultation paper:

"It is the wish of the Minister that in the present economic climate the industry itself should determine how to produce a high-quality product."

The industry promptly responded by phasing out the chemical solvents that might have prevented BSE from getting into the food chain.

The Government long refused to accept the risk to public health from BSE, as exemplified by the famous observation of the present Secretary of State for the Environment that

"nobody need be worried about BSE, in this country or anywhere else."

Fortunately, he was moved to another job just before we discovered how worried we ought to be.

Finally, even when Ministers introduced regulations to control BSE, they failed to enforce them, and as late as last year, 48 per cent. of slaughterhouses and 17 per cent. of rendering houses were in breach of BSE controls; and, in March this year, eight feed mills were still found to be breaching regulations to keep animal protein out of feedstuffs. The crisis in our beef industry was made in Britain. The genius of Her Majesty's Government is that, instead of solving the first crisis, they have paralleled it with a second crisis, in our relations with Europe.

I began by referring to the human hardship caused by the collapse of the beef market. Farmers, especially hill farmers, watched their way of life being put at risk, and workers in the processing industry watched their jobs disappearing. They are watching this debate and will note how we vote; we owe it to them to vote against a Government who have failed them, and we owe it to ourselves to vote against the Government, because we know that they deceived the House in June over the deal they brought back from Florence, and that they have broken the commitment they gave about when the ban would be lifted. All hon. Members with any self-respect must resent that deception, and I urge them to join us in the Lobby tonight.

3.57 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Douglas Hogg): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates the Government on the action it has taken to deal with the BSE crisis which has led to the restoration of consumer confidence; welcomes the package of support the Government has provided to the beef industry; notes the significant improvement in the measures to deal with the disposal of animals over 30 months of age and the progress made towards meeting the criteria set out in the agreement for lifting the European ban on British beef; and urges the Labour Party to drop its cynical political opportunism at the expense of many who depend on this important industry."

I begin my response to the debate with at least one assertion with which we can all agree: BSE has been a disaster for British agriculture and a tragedy for all those whose lives and livelihoods depend on a prosperous beef sector. Against that background, we have a right to expect that all those who participate in a debate on BSE, whether in this place or in the newspapers or elsewhere, should do so in a rational, considered and sober way, because scares, alarmist headlines and ill-judged political point scoring damage consumer confidence. That reinforces the prejudices of those who do not wish to see the ban lifted and thereby damages the interests of British farmers.

Prominent among those whom I most condemn is the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). Her comments on 20 March, when she raised quite unjustified scares about the risks of feeding beef to children, did a great deal to damage consumer confidence in Britain.

In addition, I very much regret that on 22 March the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) gave his support to the imposition of a beef ban, making our task harder, reinforcing the position of member states when they did not deserve to have their position reinforced.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Let me correct that from the Dispatch Box for the second time. We have

been round this course before. When the French Government took action immediately following the announcement to stop beef and animals moving into France, I said that I liked to think that had the situation developed in France, a British Government would have done the same. That is quite different from the worldwide beef ban. The French Government's action was justified. What was not justified was the subsequent worldwide beef ban. The French Government were talking about a temporary cessation of trade in the crisis, which was obviously justified. We have made it clear throughout that the worldwide beef ban is not justified, and the Minister knows that.

Mr. Hogg: That is a case of wriggle, wriggle, wriggle.

The hon. Gentleman made two statements. He made a statement on 24 March, which he has summarised reasonably accurately, but he omitted to mention the press release that he put out on 22 March, which is the one to which I was referring, when he said in terms:

"A temporary cessation in the movement of British cattle, beef and beef products into the continent may be wise at this time."

He did not thereafter qualify it.

It is interesting to note that the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), in the first of the observations that he made on a ban in the course of this afternoon's speech, found a justification for the imposition by member states of a ban on British beef and beef products, and that is a profoundly unsatisfactory state of affairs.

That brings me to a point that I wanted to make about the right hon. Member for Livingston. I have seldom heard a more self-indulgent speech made in the House from the Front Bench. By adopting the case of member states he makes it much harder for us to secure a lifting of the ban. Furthermore, everybody in the agriculture industry will have noticed that the right hon. Gentleman could not or would not say whether he would support a cull order. In truth, it was the most irrelevant and least illuminating speech that I have heard for some while. It surprises me that it was thought right to allow the shadow Foreign Secretary to move the motion when the Opposition agriculture spokesman is sitting beside him.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Will the Minister support a cull order?

Mr. Hogg: I shall shortly tell the House exactly where we stand on that matter.

Any discussion of BSE must start with the proposition that British beef is safe. I say that for at least four reasons. First, the only British beef on the United Kingdom market is from the younger animal, and that provides a high degree of assurance. Secondly, all BSE suspects are removed from the food chain. Thirdly, we have established in the slaughterhouses the most rigorous and comprehensive set of controls of any in Europe, with the result that all parts of the carcase capable of harbouring the infected agent are stripped out and destroyed. Fourthly, we have removed from the food chain all the meat and bonemeal that is believed to have triggered BSE in the first place.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hogg: No, I shall not give way at the moment.

For all those reasons, I can say with complete confidence that British beef is safe and that the consumer can eat it, confident as to both its quality and its safety. That is not only my view or that expressed by the leading experts in the United Kingdom, but the view of the World Health Organisation and its veterinary equivalent, the Office International des Epizooties, and of Jacques Santer and Franz Fischler.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Hogg: I shall give way in a moment.

It is therefore all the more unreasonable—indeed, it is unlawful—that member states should have imposed the ban in the first instance and that they should have defended its continuation thereafter. The ban is not based on scientific criteria, nor on a proper consideration of the objective facts. It was imposed and is now adhered to because of internal pressure in member states. I say that the single market is being disrupted for reasons that are wholly improper.

I give way, first, to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) and then to my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend).

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Was it not an absolute disgrace that contaminated feed was still being exported from this country as late as June this year? How can we possibly expect the French and the other continental countries to believe that we have done everything we possibly can to eradicate the disease, when we continued to send them poisoned feed?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman misunderstands the facts. The controls that were put in place at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s related to the feeding of meat and bonemeal to ruminants. They did not preclude the feeding of meat and bonemeal to farm animals that were not ruminants. What was being exported was, therefore, also lawful in this country. We reinforced the controls this spring when we prohibited the feeding to all farm animals of rations containing meat and bonemeal. The objective of that was to prevent any risk of cross-contamination.

Mr. John Townend: In view of what my right hon. and learned Friend has said, does he agree that this country has been double-crossed by our European partners in respect of the lifting of the beef ban, just as we have been double-crossed in respect of the social chapter opt-out? Does he agree that they are enjoying taking British export markets and that they have no intention of lifting the ban for several years?

Mr. Hogg: I shall turn shortly to my assessment of the position of member states. If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I shall deal with his question when I reach that point in my speech.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke) *rose—*

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger), but then I must make progress with my speech.

Mr. Ainger: The Minister has just spent some time describing how all the specified bovine offal has been

[Mr. Ainger]

removed from carcases and so cannot enter the human food chain and I agree with him that it is safe. Can he therefore explain to the House why the Government entered the Florence agreement?

Mr. Hogg: I now come to the Florence agreement in my speech. I believe that that agreement represents a triumph of the negotiating skills of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, because it provides a framework within which the ban can be lifted. The basic structure of the Florence agreement is that the United Kingdom undertook to take certain steps and, in return for that action, the European Union agreed to a progressive lifting of the ban.

We have already implemented all but one of the five Florence preconditions. We have withdrawn meat and bonemeal from farms and feedmills; we have introduced cattle passports; we have tightened yet further our slaughterhouse controls; and we have destroyed more than 850,000 cattle under the over-30-month scheme. Against that background we had every reason to expect an increased willingness on the part of member states to move on the ban.

Thus far, the signs have been disappointing. My clear impression, based on many discussions within and without the Council and from all that I have seen, heard and read, is that member states are facing strong internal pressures. Like us, they are having to assess the latest scientific evidence. That said, they do not appear to be in a position to agree to a rapid and substantial lifting of the ban, which was the basis for our commitments made at Florence.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: I will give way in a moment.

It seems that the most promising way forward might be to seek a lifting of the ban in respect of specialist herds and—more difficult—in respect of cattle born after 1 August 1996. In that context, it is worth noting that some parts of the United Kingdom are well placed in that the incidence of BSE is low and traceability is good.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle) *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: I will give way to my hon. Friend, then to the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and then to other hon. Members who have been attempting to intervene.

Mr. Wardle: What my right hon. and learned Friend has to say about Florence and Europe is illuminating, but I hope that he will spend part of his speech talking about the plight of farmers in this country. Does he accept that the 10 per cent. reduction in the 30-month slaughter compensation has hit many farmers caught waiting in the slaughter queue, through no fault of their own, at the very time of year when feed costs are going up and they are already having to use winter feed supplies? Given all the chaos over which he has presided, why hit farmers when they are already down?

Mr. Hogg: I will tell my hon. Friend a great deal about the support that we have given to the beef sector. I am sure that he will be encouraged by the speed at which we are processing the backlog.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): As the Minister has said, it has been obvious for some time that the solution to the ban will be through a United Kingdom-wide certified herd scheme under which, at present, many Ulster herds and some Scottish herds would qualify immediately. What is the position with regard to that scheme? Has a scheme been formally submitted to the Commission or is it being held back by a dog-in-the-manger attitude on the part of some others?

Mr. Hogg: It is true that some parts of the United Kingdom—the hon. Gentleman mentioned Ulster—are particularly well suited to benefit from certified herd or beef assurance schemes. That is based in part upon traceability and the low incidence of BSE in the Province. We have discussed with the European Commissioner and his officials various concepts surrounding the beef assurance scheme and the certified herd scheme. They have approved the beef assurance scheme for the United Kingdom market. We have not yet submitted detailed working papers, which would be the step preceding formal proposals by the Commission for a lifting of the ban to be put to the Standing Veterinary Committee.

Mr. Robert Jackson: My right hon. and learned Friend knows of the anxiety within the farming community that the Florence agreement should be implemented by our partners and, therefore, by ourselves. My right hon. and learned Friend has mentioned his clear impressions and the signs that our partners will not honour their commitment to the Florence agreement. Surely the simplest thing would be to ask them whether they would implement their commitment to the agreement if we do what we have to do under the terms of that agreement.

Mr. Hogg: If we were to ask a question in those terms, we would simply be referred back to the Florence agreement. When we move forward with particular proposals, we must judge what sort of response we will get. It is always difficult, but we must judge that by people's words and deeds, both public and private. It is on that basis that I have made my statement.

Madam Speaker, you looked at your watch, so I shall make progress and shall give way to other hon. Members later.

It is important that we should not lose sight of the scientific facts. Those facts were usefully brought together by Professor Anderson in his article in *Nature* magazine, to which the right hon. Member for Livingston referred in somewhat disparaging terms.

There are two key points. First, BSE will be eradicated from the British herd by 2001 or thereabouts. The number of cases is falling year on year by about 40 per cent. The high point was in 1992, when we had 36,700 cases. That figure fell in 1994 to 24,000 cases; in 1995 there were 14,000, and in 1996 we expect about 8,000. Secondly,

there are no credible cull policies—that is, policies involving a size of cull that the House would accept—which would bring forward the date when BSE will be eliminated, or decisively accelerate the rate of decline.

I shall spell out that point a little more clearly. We have already had around 160,000 confirmed cases of BSE. Before the disease dies out in 2001 or thereabouts, we are likely to have around 8,000 more cases. A cull policy involving 128,000—that being the number agreed at Florence—or, indeed, any cull that would commend itself to the House, would still leave us with about two thirds of the anticipated number of confirmed cases. There are no public health arguments for a substantial cull, because the measures to which I have referred already address that question.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow) *rose—*

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) *rose—*

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale) *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), and then I shall give way to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell).

Mr. Greenway: My right hon. and learned Friend said—accurately, I suspect—that other member states seemed unprepared to honour the Florence agreement if the cull went ahead. There is growing support among farmers for the cull to go ahead so that we honour our side of the bargain. Will my right hon. and learned Friend tell the House what the European Commissioner's view is? My understanding is that the European Commissioner, Franz Fischler, has throughout been helpful to my right hon. and learned Friend and the Government in trying to find a way of resolving this problem. It should be possible to get agreement, at least with Franz Fischler, on a way of resolving the conundrum that unless we have the cull, the ban will not be lifted. That is increasingly what more of our farmers think.

Mr. Hogg: I have always found the Commissioner to be straight and direct. I am grateful to him for the candid way in which he has always dealt with me.

The position of farmers has changed. In the summer and early autumn of this year, the National Farmers Union was strongly opposed to an accelerated cull. It has modified its position, but it has an unduly optimistic expectation of how far the ban would be lifted. The important issue that it has to face is whether it wants a full cull for a very limited lifting of the ban. That is a matter of great importance to them and to the House.

Mr. Dalyell: On the latest scientific research, *Nature* has not addressed the question of what is being done to find the basic causes. That was addressed by Dr. Bob Will of the neuropathogens unit and the CJD research surveillance unit at the Western general hospital in Edinburgh, who came to a meeting of 130 farmers and butchers which I chaired in my constituency. What is the basic science, especially in relation to the suspicions about prions? Will the Government make a statement about how they are setting about the basic science, because they cannot be sure about 2001 or any other date unless more is known about the root causes, and that may require more expenditure on scientific research.

Mr. Hogg: There are a number of possible causes of BSE in the United Kingdom herd, but I believe that the most widely accepted view among experts is that the feeding of meat and bonemeal containing the remains of sheep triggered the condition, although other causes have been suggested.

Mr. Robin Cook: The Minister said that Franz Fischler had always been candid with him, but did not convey to the House what view Franz Fischler had expressed when being candid. Has not Franz Fischler gone on record as saying, as recently as two weeks ago, that it will not be possible to continue lifting any part of the ban until the condition of a selective cull is fulfilled? Will he now present proposals to fulfil that condition? If he does, we will not oppose him. Will he now present proposals for a cull?

Mr. Hogg: We now have the humorous situation of the right hon. Gentleman's having said one thing in his speech and another in his intervention. But he is right: Commissioner Franz Fischler has always been very direct with me, and he has always said that a cull must take place. That statement, however, conceals as much as it discloses. The rate of lifting of the ban, the rate of implementation of the cull and the stages that will be delivered in response to a lifting of the ban are matters for discussion in the European Union and the European Commission.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hogg: No, I want to make some progress. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] I do not think that anyone can accuse me of not having given way. I think that I have given way to eight or nine hon. Members so far.

Let me say something about maternal transmission. The House will recall that, early in the summer, scientists advised that the calves of affected dams were more likely to develop BSE than those of unaffected dams. On further consideration, it has become clear that we may not be seeing maternal transmission of the disease in the true sense. What we may be seeing is transmission of a susceptibility to contaminated feedstuffs, which is a different matter.

The difference is important. If there is true maternal transmission, certain cull policies might be justified on that basis. Quite different conclusions would flow from a decision that what was being transmitted was, in fact, a susceptibility to contaminated feedstuffs. I hope that we shall have a view on that important matter within a few months.

For all those reasons, we have not presented the House with proposals for a full-scale cull. It is important to see the outcome of the European Union's scientific deliberations on the latest evidence. It is also useful to have the opportunity of listening to the views of hon. Members—

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: In that case, will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hogg:—in particular, on the balance to be struck between likely progress on the ban as I have outlined it,

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and the implementation of a selective cull. And, of course, we have not completed the clearing of the backlog under the over-30-months scheme.

Rev. Ian Paisley *rose—*

Mr. Bruce: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman serves no interest by shouting in that way. I give way to the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley).

Rev. Ian Paisley: In his reply to the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), the Minister said that he had discussed the certified herd scheme with the European authorities, but had not yet submitted papers to them. Will he promise us that he will take that course, and submit the papers?

Mr. Hogg: I think that there may be some misunderstanding. I have discussed certified herds and the beef assurance scheme with the Commission and the Commissioner, and they have had papers; but there is a difference between having papers and having the formal working proposals—the documents referred to in the Florence documents—which triggers the process that causes the Commission, we hope, to go to the Standing Veterinary Committee. The Commission and the commissioners have not had those formal working papers.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce *rose—*

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim) *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: I am going to give way to the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs).

Mr. Beggs: My hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) have both pressed the Minister. My question is simple: why have the papers not been completed and forwarded for consideration?

Mr. Hogg: There is a distinction between discussing the proposal for certified herds and discussing the beef assurance scheme. We discussed the concept of the scheme and the scheme itself in the context, initially, of the UK because it is an exception to the over-30-month scheme. We had approval from the Commission to go ahead with that. It is also a step in the lifting of the ban, but moving on the formal lifting of the ban must be triggered by a cull, by bringing forward specific proposals following a cull, and by putting them to the Commission, on the basis of which it can lay formal proposals to the Standing Veterinary Committee. We have not yet done that.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce *rose—*

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East) *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: I have already and on various occasions explained why we have not yet done that. I turn to the over-30-month scheme, which has been the subject of a certain amount of comment in this place.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hogg: I am making some progress. I have seldom seen a more excited gentleman than the hon. Gentleman.

I remind hon. Members of the origin of the over-30-month scheme. Its first purpose was to provide an extra safeguard for public health. It also met the joint demands of supermarkets and the National Farmers Union. I agreed with those views and persuaded our European Union partners to adopt the scheme as an EU measure, funded by European funds.

The over-30-month scheme has important and beneficial consequences. First, it has reassured the consumer. We must not overlook the fact that, having dropped significantly, the consumption of beef is now back to around 80 per cent. of its pre-March level. Secondly, the scheme has underpinned the beef market. Had we not slaughtered about 860,000 beasts under the scheme, the beef market would be much weaker.

Mr. Sheerman: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hogg: I will make some progress and then give way.

It is true that there is a backlog of animals to be culled, but in the past four weeks the position has greatly improved. The register that we have compiled shows a present backlog of around 320,000 beasts. We have taken steps to improve throughput: we have altered the rendering mix and brought more capacity on stream. On 8 October, I announced a further £16.6 million for extra cold storage. Taken together, those steps have enabled us to increase the weekly rate of slaughter to 59,000. The register will enable us to give priority to registered animals—to animals now on the backlog—and on that basis we hope and believe that we will be able to clear the backlog on a UK basis by around Christmas.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that much of what he says will be deeply disappointing to beef farmers in Scotland who, only on Monday, met Franz Fischler and came out of the meeting urging him to put pressure on the Minister to secure the implementation of the cull, in accordance with the Florence agreement? Does the Minister not acknowledge that Scottish farmers are ready, willing and able to start implementing the cull now, and that that could be the first phase of the British implementation of the Florence agreement? Why will he not agree to that?

Mr. Hogg: The House and everyone concerned with the debate have to ask themselves this: what is the likely response to the imposition of the accelerated slaughter plan? The best judgment that we can make at the moment is that member states are facing very strong internal pressure from their consumers, farming unions and others not to agree to a rapid and substantial lifting of the ban. Therefore, it seems to us, probably, that the best way forward is to concentrate on the specialist herds and possibly cattle born after 1 August. What this House has got to do is to decide whether the balance is the correct one, it being less favourable than that which we anticipated, and had every reason to anticipate to be the case at the time of Florence.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack).

Sir Patrick Cormack: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for giving way. He will know from his

visit that farmers in Staffordshire take a similar line to that just mentioned by the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). I understand my right hon. and learned Friend's dilemma, but can he not seek an early meeting with his colleagues and a firm undertaking from them that if the accelerated cull is implemented, there will indeed be an assurance that the ban will be lifted?

Mr. Hogg: It would be highly desirable of course that, if we had to implement any accelerated cull policy, we did so against the background of an agreed timetable for the lifting of the ban, but the House needs to be honest with itself and with the country: we are not going to get from the European member states a precise timetable for the lifting of the ban. Therefore, the Government and others have to make a judgment as to what the member states will do if we take certain steps, including undertaking an accelerated cull.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: I give way to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon).

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): The Minister will be aware that European Commissioner Fischler has said clearly that he will make special arrangements for Scotland and the north of Ireland because of the protections available there. Will the Minister not put the Commissioner to the test by asking for those special arrangements for Northern Ireland and Scotland? He will then find out the commitment of the Commission. He will help the Scottish beef industry and help to save the Northern Ireland beef industry, while learning what, in effect, he suspects.

Mr. Hogg: I have not in fact heard the Commissioner express himself in precisely the terms that the hon. Gentleman has outlined, but I have already made the point that there are some parts of the United Kingdom that are particularly well placed, having regard to the low incidence of BSE and traceability. That fact is well understood by the Commissioner.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) and then I must make some progress.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept that what he has just said could be interpreted as weasel words? Furthermore, does he accept that, in the light of everything that has gone on in the past few months, the most important thing is that we get an absolute guarantee from the member states? It is not a matter of judgment, but a matter of practicality that we get an absolute guarantee from them that if we honour our side of the Florence agreement, they will lift the ban. If not, there will be serious trouble from those on the Conservative Benches.

Mr. Hogg: I do not think I justify the criticism of having used weasel words—I stated the position absolutely plainly. I say to my hon. Friend that I might wish that it was otherwise, but the position is that we are not going to get from the member states an absolute guaranteed timetable leading to dates when the ban will be lifted. We are not going to get that.

Mr. Robin Cook *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman will just have to contain himself for the moment. I am not going to pretend that we will get such a guaranteed timetable because if I did so, I should be deceiving the House.

Mr. Cook: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has now said twice that it is not possible to get an absolute timetable out of the European member states. Can he therefore explain why the Prime Minister said as late as 4 July that the ban would be lifted by November?

Mr. Hogg: The Prime Minister also made it plain that it was not possible to get a timetable from the European Union—which has always been the case. I am glad to have an opportunity, once again, to reaffirm that fact. Inevitably, we must make a judgment on the likely response to any action that we may think fit to take within the framework of the Florence agreement.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: No; I shall make some more progress now.

The over-30-month scheme has been an important way in which to reassure the consumer and to underpin the beef market. It is, however, only one strand in an extended policy of support. Since 20 March 1996, the Government have committed huge sums in support of the beef industry and the related sectors. I shall deal with the latter point first.

We concluded that we could not assist everyone who had suffered loss: there were too many of them, and the costs would be too great. Therefore, we concentrated financial assistance on those links in the chain whose survival we judged to be essential, and which would survive only if Government funds were made available. That is why we provided transitional aid of up to £118 million for the rendering industry and up to £100 million for the slaughtering sector.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): My right hon. and learned Friend will know that one part of the industry that has not received any assistance is the cattle head deboners, who effectively have not only had their business stopped but had their property sterilised, if not confiscated. That has been deeply distressing and has caused much unemployment, and it is irrational. Is my right hon. and learned Friend prepared to meet—or to allow one of his Ministers to meet—representatives of cattle head deboners to find a sensible way forward on the issue?

Mr. Hogg: I know that that matter causes considerable concern to my hon. Friend and to other hon. Members. The issue was, today, the subject of an Adjournment debate, in which my hon. Friend spoke. The Government's position was clearly outlined in the debate by my hon. Friend the Minister of State. I do not wish to imply for a moment that we can move from that position. If my hon. Friend would like to bring a delegation of representatives of those who have been affected to my

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hon. Friend the Minister of State, I know that he would be extremely glad to see them. However, I do not wish to arouse expectations.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): Does the Minister agree that the beef crisis has borne more heavily on Northern Ireland—because of its high percentage of imports, at more than 77 per cent.—than on any other part of the United Kingdom? Does he also agree that the best method of testing the bona fides of those who imposed the ban would be to put forward our best case—which, undoubtedly, is Northern Ireland? Northern Ireland has the highest degree of animal traceability and the lowest incidence of BSE, and its agricultural producers have suffered to the greatest extent. Therefore, will the Minister press Northern Ireland's case as a pilot scheme for testing the bona fides of those imposing the ban?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. and learned Gentleman constructs a very powerful case for Northern Ireland, which I understand. We have to approach the matter collectively, having regard to the entirety of the United Kingdom. I realise that the facts mentioned by the hon. and learned Gentleman constitute a powerful case, which is already known to the Commission and to some member states. I shall ensure that those arguments are always borne in mind by all those who have to make decisions on those issues.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: I feel that I must give way to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman); he is getting so excited.

Mr. Sheerman: I thank the Minister for giving way at last. He is aware of the pent-up frustration of the farming community, and has described some of the hardships it is suffering. However, the frustration is not only over Government inaction. According to figures I received yesterday from the Minister's colleague, since March there has been a 15 to 20 per cent. drop in the market price of beef. According to figures that I received from the Library today, however, there has been only a 1 per cent. drop in the retail price of beef. Farmers and consumers are being cheated. Will he explain why? Farmers and consumers would like to know.

Mr. Hogg: Market prices are determined by the market, but the hon. Gentleman is right that there has been a substantial reduction in the price of beef sold for consumption. I am glad to say that that has increased somewhat recently and now stands at about 100p a kilo, which is still about 20 per cent. down on this time last year. He brings me naturally to my next point.

Sir Michael Spicer (South Worcestershire): As I understand it, my right hon. and learned Friend seems to have been saying in the past 20 minutes or so—I may have got him wrong, but I am sure that he will correct me if I have—that we did not get out of Florence what we expected. We are honouring all our side of the bargain, including being prepared to offer the accelerated cull, in return for nothing. In fact, he has identified public opinion around Europe as being such that it has hardened the position of other countries against us. Is it not perhaps time that we started to contemplate a new bout of disruption, a sort of double whammy of disruption for when we get to Dublin?

Mr. Hogg: Policies of disruption are—and should always be—policies of last resort. We never thought that we had a timetable in the Florence agreement. We established a process. At the time of Florence we believed, and had every reason to do so, that if we fulfilled our commitments there would be a rapid and substantial lifting of the ban. It has become plain over the summer, for the reasons that I have given, that, at least at the moment, member states are unable to deliver the rapid and substantial lifting that we all expected. I think that that is due to the internal pressures in their own countries.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hogg: I should like to proceed and explain the support that we have given to the beef industry.

Mr. Tyler: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hogg: No, I am going to make some progress.

Since June we have committed something like £263 million in support, both direct and indirect, to beef producers. That includes the July package of £109 million. I announced in September an increase of £60 million in the hill livestock compensatory allowance cattle rates. Last October, the Agriculture Council agreed aid worth £50 million in the United Kingdom, which we intend to spend in ways that will be of particular benefit to suckler producers. I announced in Bournemouth further aid worth £29 million. Today, I am pleased to announce that we shall be spending that £29 million on a second beef marketing payment scheme, covering the period between July and September.

The measures that I have described demonstrate two things: first, the absolute commitment of this Conservative Government to the needs of the rural economy and the future of British agriculture and, secondly, that the Labour motion, one not even moved by the Labour agriculture spokesman, is a fraud and a sham and should be rejected with contempt.

4.42 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I must, as ever, declare an interest since I have a personal position in a family farming business. I also have a constituency interest, since I represent many hill farmers in the Lammermuir hills. The Minister talked about fraud and a sham. I am afraid that farmers and people working in ancillary industries to the beef industry regard him as the fraud and the sham. We have just heard an awful speech from him, which was based on the unsustainable premise that our European partners are as untrustworthy as he has demonstrated himself to be over recent months.

After 18 years, I have learned to expect the worst from the Government. The problem that we are facing today meets all three dictionary definitions of the word "shambles": a mess or muddle; a butcher's slaughterhouse; a scene of carnage. That is what the industry is facing.

Since the crisis erupted in March, we have had a succession of schemes, debates, statements and palliatives, but we are still in a multiple crisis. The word "crisis" is overworked in the House, but it is for real on this occasion. There is a crisis of animal health, which now appears to be connected with a new form of CJD that has killed 14 people, possibly because some infected cattle got into the food chain in the late 1980s. There is also a crisis of consumer confidence around the world—tragically, with a consequent economic crisis that has engulfed an industry employing 600,000 people in the United Kingdom, mainly in fragile rural areas.

Even leaving aside the point that the disease should not have been allowed to develop in the first place, the Government must stand condemned for letting things progress from bad to worse and on towards unmitigated disaster during 10 years of prevarication and ineptitude.

The priorities must surely be to eradicate the disease and to restore consumer confidence in beef. Both require the fullest co-operation with our European Union partners, but the Government's political agenda requires confrontation with them whenever possible, so we started off with the infantile beef war earlier in the year.

There is a consensus almost everywhere, except in the Government, that a selective, targeted cull of the cattle most likely to be infected with BSE is desirable to speed up the decline of the disease and to help to restore consumer confidence. The whole House has accepted that in previous debates and I made the point in a debate as early as 28 March. Since then, the Government have been all over the place. They had a self-destructive confrontation with the European Union. Then they decided to implement a selective cull as the basis of the Florence settlement of 22 June. Then they decided to renege on that settlement.

Meanwhile, the beef industry and associated industries, employing a total of 600,000 people, are on the rack. Butchers, hauliers, farmers and many others are facing ruin. We now have a serious consequential animal welfare problem because large numbers of unmarketable cattle are stuck on farms. It will be difficult to find feed and housing for them during the winter. Problems will certainly arise from that.

The Minister mentioned the over-30-month slaughter scheme which is working, after a fashion, better in Scotland than in other parts of the United Kingdom. However, there are serious delays in some areas. In September, the Government cut the compensation payable to farmers under the scheme by 10 per cent., to add grief to the businesses caught up in the queue. The scheme is, by definition, not targeted. It is a pretty crude measure to take stock off the market. We have the scheme, but there is no sign of progress towards reassuring consumers in export markets, let alone a lifting of the ban.

The Prime Minister announced the Florence agreement proudly to the House at the end of June.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): The triumph.

Mr. Home Robertson: The triumph, as my hon. Friend calls it. The framework referred to in the agreement stipulated the action that the United Kingdom is committed to taking to accelerate the disappearance of the disease. When in place, that action will bring about a step-by-step relaxation of the export ban.

The terms could not have been clearer. Without action on a selective cull of cattle likely to be infected with BSE, there will be no end to the export ban. That was accepted by the industry, by the European Union, by the House and, ostensibly, by the Government but, eight months on, nothing has happened.

The Minister mentioned his doubts about the willingness of the European Union to keep to the time scale suggested. Why have the Government made no move to keep their part of the bargain on the time scale? As far as I can make out, the Minister of Agriculture has done damn all in England and Wales.

There has been some posturing by the Scottish Office, but it seems that only Northern Ireland will be able to fulfil the Florence criteria. I had the privilege of visiting the Northern Ireland Agriculture Department a couple of weeks ago with colleagues on the committee of the British-Irish parliamentary body and I was impressed by what I saw there. The Department has developed an elaborate computerised record system for all cattle in the Province to help to promote quality assurance and to eradicate other diseases. Happily and coincidentally, that development should make it possible to make rapid progress with a selective cull in Northern Ireland because the Department can identify the relevant cattle.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, rather more than two years ago, Aberdeen and Northern Marts which, as he knows, is one of the chief marketing and slaughter companies in Scotland, commissioned a feasibility study into a traceability system for Scotland? According to Brian Pack, the chief executive of Aberdeen and Northern Marts, such a system could be implemented in a matter of months. However, the Government expressed no interest in it. Does the hon. Gentleman have any comment to make on the fact that, at no time during the BSE crisis, have the Government shown any interest in introducing a traceability scheme in Scotland?

Mr. Home Robertson: I doubt whether the scheme could be implemented in a matter of months, but I believe that it is deplorable that the Government have not even begun to look for the cattle concerned and have not put together anything like the quality record system that exists in Northern Ireland. I agree with the thrust of the point made by the hon. Gentleman.

It will probably be necessary for the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture to locate about 2,000 cattle which will need to be slaughtered under a selective programme. The Northern Irish could probably do that immediately, which is to the credit of the Northern Ireland Office. I deplore the fact that neither the Scottish Office nor the Ministry of Agriculture is moving in the same direction.

Mr. Mallon: I take the hon. Gentleman's point about the north of Ireland. He said that the north of Ireland fulfilled the Florence criteria. In reality, there are 1,700 cattle, instantly traceable, which, I am told by the authorities, could be dealt with in one day if the Government asked the EU Commission to make such an

[Mr. Mallon]

arrangement for the north of Ireland. That is what is standing between the beef industry in the north of Ireland and its potential demise.

Mr. Home Robertson: The point is clearly made. The preparatory work has been done in Northern Ireland and it should be done in Scotland, in Wales and in England.

Characteristically, the Scottish Office has been blowing hot and cold on the issue. The Secretary of State suggested that he would achieve great things when he attended last month's Agriculture Council meeting. Interestingly, he wrote to hon. Members on 23 September to report on progress. He said:

"my officials are working closely with those in the SNFU to ensure that we can progress preparations as far as possible in advance, so that we are in a position to start culling in Scotland if circumstances permit."

We understand that that would have involved about 4,000 cattle.

Presumably, such a cull would have been carried out with a view to getting an early lifting of the export ban for the whole of Scotland or at least for clean specialist beef herds, mostly in the hills and uplands of Scotland. The letter was good news. It seemed that the intention was to start the process of selective culling to fulfil the Florence conditions and thus to make it possible to restart beef exports from Scotland, which are vital for the Scottish economy.

However, I am a naturally suspicious soul, especially where the Scottish Office is concerned, so I tabled a parliamentary question last week to the Secretary of State just to find out how the Scottish Office was getting on with finding the cattle in the cohorts that were likely to be infected with BSE and that would need to be culled to fulfil the Florence criteria.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), replied:

"Data on all herds with confirmed cases of BSE are held at the Central Veterinary Laboratory. This data can be used to identify the herd of birth of BSE cases—and hence animals subject to the same feeding regimes; that is, the birth cohorts. To identify all these at-risk animals, it is necessary to visit the herds of origin, to identify the cohort animals remaining in such herds and finally to determine the present location of cohort animals which have moved to other herds. This involves detailed inspection of records. In May of this year, the CVL made an estimate that a maximum of 127,000 cohort animals were present on farms in Britain, of which some 4,300 were in Scotland. Given the need for on-farm visits and reference to on-farm records, it is impossible to give a reliable estimate of how long it would take to identify all these animals."—[*Official Report*, 11 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. 55.]

The agreement was made in June and now, five months later, the Department has not even started to set up the record system, never mind identifying the cattle that would need to be culled in order to fulfil the Florence criteria. It has not even started to look for the cohorts and individual cattle that are likely to be infected in preparation for fulfilment of the agreement that was reached in June.

There may be a problem with confidentiality at the Central Veterinary Laboratory. The CVL is either unable or unwilling to disclose or disseminate information about infected animals and the farms where they originated. For goodness sake, surely the Government should be able to address administrative points of that nature.

In England and Wales, the Department has not even pretended to start preparatory work for the cull. I appreciate the reluctance in the dairy industry to lose milking cows, but the disease is largely rooted in the dairy herd, so that is probably the main sector where it will have to be eradicated. The Florence agreement is all we have. Why are the British Government sabotaging the agreement that they trumpeted in June?

The Department should address another practicality—the discrepancy in the EU rules whereby in other nations in the European Union, including the Republic of Ireland, individual herds are deemed to be infected, whereas in the United Kingdom it is the farms that are deemed to be infected. Therefore, farms in France, the Republic of Ireland and elsewhere where cases of BSE have been identified can take the straightforward step of slaughtering cattle to wipe the slate clean and start afresh, but the current rules make that impossible in any part of the United Kingdom where the land of the farm is flagged up as being infected. That will have to be addressed and I should be grateful if the Minister could do so in his reply to the debate or in writing.

Let me conclude by quoting a mild-mannered neighbour of mine, Mr. Sandy Mole, the president of the National Farmers Union for Scotland. He represents people who would normally tend to support the Conservative party, but he and his members and those representing the other industries that are directly affected by this disaster feel betrayed and furious.

On 2 October Mr. Mole said:

"The recent outbreak of xenophobia led by the usual gang of anti-European fanatics has put the Florence Agreement in real danger . . . We must not allow people's livelihoods to become embroiled in a festival of political point scoring."

That is precisely what was happening within the Conservative party at the time.

On 8 October, Mr. Mole said:

"We have lost patience with the political wrangles which stand in the way of progress being made to lift the export ban on beef. The time has come for positive progress to be made. The Prime Minister made a deal: he must stand by it . . . Scotland's people will not stand for this sort of discrimination"—

that was in favour of Northern Ireland—

"which would so blatantly be based on the Parliamentary arithmetic of keeping fringe interests quiet. The Secretary of State for Scotland is in no doubt about the strength of our views on this subject."

Finally, Mr. Mole said on 11 October:

"In all this Government muddle we are trying to get across the simple message that the selective cull must begin or there will be no progress in lifting the ban anywhere in the United Kingdom. It is high time John Major took a grip of this bumbling shambles of a policy before some agreement is forced on Scotland by civil servants sitting behind desks in London."

That was strong stuff from the president of the National Farmers Union of Scotland. He is right to suspect that Scottish interests may be being sacrificed.

It is time that the Secretary of State for Scotland stood up for that country. The National Farmers Union of Scotland is right to be furious at the betrayal of the Florence agreement. That is the only way forward for the British beef industry, which employs 600,000 people directly or indirectly. Therefore, I urge the Government to stop deceiving the House, the country, the industry and the European Union and to begin to make serious progress towards implementing the Florence agreement.

4.59 pm

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): The briefest reading of the Opposition motion, together with the announcement that it would be moved by the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), gave the clearest sign that today's debate would be more about politics than about the serious issues surrounding BSE, which deeply concern so many of our constituents and constitute a major crisis for the agriculture industry. The right hon. Gentleman had the gall to open his speech by saying that the matter had been too little discussed in the House and claiming the credit for being the first to launch a full-day debate on the subject. Where has he been all these months, when a number of us—I pay tribute to some hon. Members on the Opposition Benches—have been present and debating the issues?

The right hon. Member for Livingston then had the nerve to make a speech that had little to do with BSE but much to do with his political agenda. I thought that he might have done the House, and the agriculture industry, the credit of being better briefed. He did not even know whether his party was in favour of the accelerated cull and he had to be briefed afterwards. It was not his finest parliamentary hour and his whole body language showed that perhaps he also realised that.

The House will know that I have not been an uncritical admirer of the handling of the crisis. I understand that, since the original, unhelpful leak in the newspapers that precipitated the announcement on BSE, my right hon. and learned Friend the Agriculture Minister and his colleagues have been faced with a massive problem. I recall the panic at the start that affected the markets. Auctioneers even rang farmers to tell them not to bring any cattle to the market and nobody had any expectation about when the auctions might be resumed. It is against that background that I review the problems.

The crisis has posed major problems. I do not regard the Minister of Agriculture and the team of staff at the various official levels of the Ministry of Agriculture as uniquely equipped to handle the crisis. We need to have lean and efficient Ministries, not over-manned Ministries, but when they are faced with a crisis of this kind, there should be a system that can give them the reinforcement that they need to tackle the problems. That is an important general point of public administration. The crisis has challenged the Ministry of Agriculture, the Intervention Board and the industry.

The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) said that hauliers had had their livelihoods destroyed, but other hauliers have never made so much money in their lives. The crisis challenged the industry, as I have said, but the Government said that we must all pull together to face the crisis. The Prime Minister made a pledge and my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture repeated it. Our determination was to save the industry. That is what we sought to do and that is what I believe that we have achieved. The tragedy is that, in certain parts, the industry has not pulled together. I am sure that I am not the only hon. Member who has heard complaints about people who have exploited the system and taken advantage of the crisis. Preferment has been given in the abattoirs and various deals have been done in which certain people have exploited the situation. That has led to the necessary introduction of the registration scheme and my local farmers union believes that that will deal with the problem, together with the speed-up of the over-30-month cull.

I hope that we shall hear further details about how we shall deal with the further arisings of over-30-month cattle when the original backlog has been cleared, and perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister of State will be able to say something about that when he winds up. I also hope that we have come through the worst of the mischief and that the new arrangements will ensure greater fairness.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Agriculture Minister referred to a figure of 850,000 for the cull. He referred to a further 320,000 that will come through the registration scheme. I should like to know whether that is the number of cattle still waiting to be culled or whether it represents the number of cattle that has been registered, of which perhaps some 100,000 have been slaughtered in two weeks at 50,000 a week. If the latter is the case, the number will already have been significantly dented; I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will be able to confirm that.

Against that background, the fifth tenet of the Florence agreement—the accelerated cull—takes on a different dimension. If we have slaughtered 850,000 cattle and if we are going for some 250,000 more, we shall move towards 1.2 million. It has been suggested that, because some of the cattle in the cohorts that might have been part of the accelerated cull have already gone under the present culling process, the actual requirement of the accelerated cull might be less than 10 per cent. of what we have already slaughtered.

Sentiment in my part of the world is now changing. We have not implemented the accelerated cull—the fifth ingredient in the Florence agreement—because the full capacity has been taken up by the over-30-month scheme. It is only by the second or third week of December or by January that we shall be in a position, allowing for any further arisings of cattle not in the backlog but now over 30 months, in which we can embark on an accelerated cull.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry) *rose—*

Mr. King: I doubt that I shall be able to answer any question on the subject, but I shall give way.

Mr. Ross: I am trying to be helpful to the right hon. Gentleman, as usual. Is he aware that in Northern Ireland, where we formerly had some 2,000 cattle that would have been covered by the accelerated cull, that number is now down to 1,700 because 300 have already been disposed of through the on-going slaughter policy? Northern Ireland is not as far advanced as the rest of the country and if we apply the same statistic to Great Britain, his figures are likely to be correct.

Mr. King: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I have, from my personal experience, the highest regard for the records that are kept in Northern Ireland. They are why the hon. Gentleman is able to give us such specific information about the situation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Paul Marland (West Gloucestershire): As we have fulfilled four of the five conditions that were laid

[Mr. Paul Marland]

down at the Florence summit, is it not irritating that we have received no co-operation from our European partners over some way to lift the ban?

Mr. King: I was not prepared to support an accelerated cull in July. I thought that the question was premature and we did not know what further scientific evidence would arise in the following months. We heard much about maternal transmission, although I am not quite sure what the position on that is now. Other developments took place and now the question arises for serious consideration. We should now address that issue seriously with the Commission. I understand the problem that my right hon. and learned Friend the Agriculture Minister has now, because I appreciate the problem of what I call the gelatine retreat. My understanding is that we are now clear on gelatine, on the authority of the European Union and the Commission, which has the authority to lift the ban, but the other member states—I stand to be corrected on this point—have all found ways to prevent any gelatine from being admitted to their countries. That is obviously a most unsatisfactory situation and one that we need to address.

The more painful aspect of the present situation is not just the position in individual member states but the nature of the worldwide ban. Some alleviation of that ban would help with the opening of markets which are important to our farmers.

Mr. Salmond: Does the right hon. Gentleman understand the frustration of Northern Ireland Members? In Northern Ireland, animals for the selective slaughter can be identified. In Scotland, we have no backlog in the 30-month scheme. We are hanging around while our industries are in crisis waiting for the Minister of Agriculture to decide to support the selective slaughter. Why cannot Scotland and Northern Ireland get on with the job and why will not the Government support that?

Mr. King: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman's intervention reinforces the belief in the west country that the allocation of animals for slaughter was unfairly tilted. We in the west country still have a substantial backlog. That is not entirely a serious response. The hon. Gentleman has just trodden on a painful grievance of the west country, where a significant number of animals are awaiting slaughter. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) will know why I say that. We now need to challenge the European Union and the Commission to move towards the accelerated cull and lift the ban.

I have thrown some brickbats around today, but I also want to pay some tributes. I pay tribute to the British people. The figures on beef consumption are encouraging. In the west country and in other areas, people have shown a determination to support British agriculture. That is one of the things that has helped to ensure that consumption of beef is as high as it is, although we obviously want to see it improve, and to see the price of beef improve.

I pay tribute to the Government. They have faced many difficulties. The right hon. Member for Livingston said that we had done too little too late. He said that to a Government who have committed some £3,000 million to this process over three years. In their tongue-tied way, the Opposition criticise the Government. I challenge the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), when he replies to the debate, to say that, if the Labour party had been in government, there would have been the slightest chance that they would have invested such sums.

My farmers have many problems and I have fought many battles with them and for them in this crisis. There was panic when farmers looked at the cattle on their farms and wondered whether they could sell them and when auctioneers rang up and told them not to bother to bring cattle to market because there was no market for them. People wondered whether they might have to bury their cattle. The Government's action and the funds that they have put in have saved the industry. It is about time that that was said. There has been too much knocking of my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister and endless criticism. The markets are living. Farmers can take cattle to the markets and sell them. We are moving through the problem. It is easy to jibe and criticise, but it is right that that tribute and recognition should be given.

5.13 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am pleased to follow the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), not so much because of his peroration but because of his introductory remarks. He rightly said that we have discussed the BSE crisis in the House on a number of occasions. I am reminded of the text on which I was brought up:

"Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."

I welcome warmly the Labour party's recognition—at long last—of the severity of the crisis, and I remind the House that on four previous occasions it has been conspicuous by its absence.

On 13 May, seven eighths of the Labour party failed to support us in the Division Lobby when we made a careful analysis of, and gave specific warnings about, the dire consequences of mishandling the crisis. Again on 21 May—the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) referred to this—the leader of the Labour party not only failed to support us, but shamefully endorsed the ludicrously counter-productive measures that the Government proposed, no doubt simply because he was scared by the jingoism of the tabloid press. It was sad, and I hope that the words of the right hon. Member for Livingston this evening will be taken as an indication that the Opposition will not be sucked into those counter-productive war games again.

On 25 June, after the ignominious collapse of the non-co-operation tactics at Florence, the Labour leadership again failed to support us here in the House and in the Division Lobby; in relation to both the ham-fisted Hogg diplomacy and to the escalating shambles over the cattle cull, nine tenths of the Labour party, including its leader, failed to vote.

On 24 July, when we had our last chance before the recess to inject some justice and urgency into the cull confusion, all but a handful of Labour Members simply went home. That showed how important they thought the issue was and how interested they were in rural areas. I note that the right hon. Member for Livingston failed to vote on every one of those occasions, so I take it that his appearance for a short time in the debate this afternoon is but a momentary lapse of attention to other matters. The

only mention of BSE in major speeches in the debate on the Queen's Speech was made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown).

Avid listeners to "The Archers"—I suspect that you are one, Mr. Deputy Speaker, being a cultivated man—will have noted the comments in this week's omnibus edition. Ruth bemoaned the failures of the Government, but Phil rightly remarked that the official Opposition had "kept pretty quiet". The victims of Government incompetence deserved more sustained, consistent and robust support.

I draw attention to the people who have been directly affected by the on-going crisis. I have here a report from the *Western Morning News* entitled "BSE tragedy as farmer is crushed to death by unsold bulls". It says:

"A farmer has been killed by his own animals—which he had been unable to sell because of the BSE crisis.

Colin Burley, 35, a divorced father of three young children, was found dead by his father at the 100-acre farm he worked on his own at Higher Trebarveth, Ponsanooth, near Redruth.

Investigations are being made into the death of the popular and hard-working man, which has shocked the farming community where he lived, but it appears he was crushed by 16 21-month-old bulls which had remained on the farm after the price dropped out of the market because of the BSE crisis. . . .

But his uncle, John Burley, said last night: 'The BSE scare has caused his death. Those bulls would have been off the farm by now if he had been able to sell them.'"

That is but one hideous consequence of the failure to manage the markets through the summer, but many other beef and dairy producers throughout the country have suffered, albeit not so dramatically or tragically, from the inadequacies of market support and of the over-30 month scheme ban.

Every week since 20 March, here at home, the dire situation with regard to the cull has been more important to farmers than has the Government's diplomatic calamities abroad. Playing war games to attempt to divert attention from the shambles at home has not conned anyone in the industry. The lesson must surely be that we must now concentrate on cleaning up the situation at home. As the right hon. Member for Bridgwater rightly said, the discrepancies in the effect of the cull in different parts of the country is a national disgrace, and mismanagement of the cull has been a disaster for which the Government must take the blame.

In the six months since it was put in place, the direction and management of the OTM scheme has demonstrated the height of incompetence. At an early stage, Ministers admitted to me that neither MAFF nor the intervention board were in charge of the scheme. In the first few weeks, the plan was to put the whole operation out to competitive tender. As hon. Members will know, every local authority is forced to go out to competitive tender even on tiny contracts. That would normally have been the case—as Ministers subsequently admitted—under both EU and UK regulations, but it was quietly dropped. I challenged Ministers, who replied that it was dropped as a result of emergency time scales. The Government's original application list for abattoirs and collection centres was 200 long, but at a stroke it was reduced to 21.

The dead hand of the cartel of big business that dominates this industry guaranteed that it kept the profitable business for itself, and how profitable it was. The £87.50 price that the businesses extracted from Ministers—remember, there was no competitive tendering—proved to be four times the economic cost calculated by the Government's auditors. Even when the price was eventually reduced, Ministers only cut it in half and failed to backdate it for two months, as had been agreed.

The extortionists demanded their pound of flesh. On 17 July, I took representatives of small abattoirs to meet the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who assured us that he was in charge. He said that he had taken over responsibility from MAFF, which had proved to be incompetent—the Prime Minister had admitted as much—but no progress was made for months, until the past few weeks.

Many hon. Members who have watched the situation unfolding may suspect that there is a hidden agenda. Just before the crisis broke on 20 March, the Meat and Livestock Commission was hawking around a plan to streamline the abattoir industry. Is it a coincidence that the larger groups are now fattening themselves very nicely at the taxpayer's expense, while smaller firms are being forced out? From Scotland to Devon, Skegness to Greater Manchester, and Wales to Northern Ireland, the meat industry is being cut to ribbons before our very eyes.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who I regret has left her place, told European Standing Committee A this morning that the industry is being reshaped by the crisis. Is this what she means? Is it deliberate? Do the Government approve of the changes that are taking place? Surely the lesson is that the failure of the Minister, MAFF and the Government to take charge has rewarded the cartel of the biggest operators at the expense of everyone else, including the taxpayer.

There is now the prospect of greater incineration and freezing capacity coming on stream, but it looks as if we are to have a repeat performance of the farce that has already occurred. The Government have indicated to a small number of large operators that they will be given preferential treatment. A very small number have been given letters of intent, without any promise that they have the plant or equipment necessary or that they can carry through their promises. In addition, there is no promise that there will be anything in it for small operators. How they have been selected is a mystery; there has certainly been no open and competitive tendering. Indeed, the operators have so fallen down on what is being asked of them that they are asking other, smaller operators to come to their aid.

Incineration South West, a smaller firm that serves much of my county of Cornwall, has not been allowed to participate fully and directly, despite having the most modern plant and full approvals. Mr. Russell Peake, the principal of that company, came with us to meet the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 17 July, and was promised urgent and favourable consideration of his application. He has since obtained all the local approvals, which came through this week. His is a respected and conscientious firm that is much used by farmers throughout the south-west.

However, the big boys of Yorkshire Water—whose waste disposal company apparently put in a bid—received a letter of intent from the intervention board. It has now been allowed to accept a contract without having plant available—so much so that it has come to Incineration South West at the other end of the country to get the adequate and modern plant to do the job, and is prepared

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

to subcontract the work. The big operators will flourish at taxpayers' expense, while smaller, better equipped, more local companies will be frozen out. Such is the profitability that Yorkshire Water is prepared to go to the other end of the country to use a small company. It will still make a large profit.

The unlucky farmers who have not yet been able to move their over-30-month cattle from their farms are facing higher feed and housing costs with each week that goes by, and the costs are escalating as winter comes in. In addition, they are facing a 10 per cent. cut in the figure—initiated by the Government in Brussels—to be paid in compensation, and they will be hit by an extra 3 per cent. cut as a result of the revaluation of the green pound. The National Farmers Union and the Country Landowners Association have today demanded that the Ministry restores in full the value of those unjustified and illogical cuts.

The Minister has told us that the cull backlog will soon be cleared. He has said outside the House that the backlog will be cleared by Christmas day, but I do not remember his mentioning that date today. When the Minister of State replies to the debate, I hope that he will say firmly that that Christmas present is guaranteed and that the date still stands. Farmers are now entitled to expect the Minister to stand by his forecast and to keep his promises. I hope that, if he is not able to do so, he will restore immediately and in full the compensation that farmers have lost.

A number of beef producers are in dire straits, particularly those who are wholly dependent on their suckler herds. On 24 October—after thousands of farmers had come here to meet us—*The Daily Telegraph* published a revealing report, headlined "Be grateful for BSE aid, Hogg tells farmers". The article contained an interesting description by one of the Minister's senior officials of a letter from the Minister to beef and dairy producers. The official said that the letter was intended to be a

"stop whingeing and count your blessings message".

If that was the intention, the Minister should resign; if the senior official did not understand his Minister's intention, he should resign. The president of the NFU said in response that

"the Government's mismanagement of the beef crisis"

was a "catastrophic affair". I have been in public life for 32 years, and I cannot remember an occasion when I or my farming community have been more angered by a ministerial announcement. Anyone would think that the farmers had knowingly, willingly and callously taken risks that had caused this crisis.

Mr. King: How is that comment to be reconciled with the letter from the NFU today which states that, despite the recent difficulties, the NFU is

"grateful for the sympathy, substantial practical assistance and extensive public expenditure"

devoted by the Government to tackling this unprecedented crisis in British agriculture?

Mr. Tyler: Nobody is saying that we are not grateful for anything we can get, but the right hon. Gentleman knows full well that—for the first time in living memory—the council of the NFU has passed a motion of no confidence in the Minister. I take that motion seriously, as I do other comments by the president of the NFU that have been quoted in the newspapers.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and West Devon): Will my hon. Friend invite Conservative Members to read the second page of the NFU letter, which states that the Government have done very little and that the NFU is unhappy? In other words, the first page of the letter shows the courtesy that we would expect from the NFU, but the second page gives us the reality.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and the Country Landowners Association—a traditional ally of the Conservative party—has made equally trenchant criticisms. I find this attempt to blame farmers and put the obligation on them despicable. They have been powerless as the cull mismanagement has deepened. As victims of the catastrophe, they deserve better than the whingeing self-pity so evident in the letter from the Minister.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman. Can he tell us who is responsible for BSE?

Mr. Tyler: It is certainly true that the conspiracy between certain big commercial organisations and those who approved their products caused farmers unwittingly to use dangerous products on their farms. The farmers cannot be held responsible for that, just as the hon. Gentleman cannot be wholly responsible for the pet food that he gives to his beloved pets, to which he refers occasionally in the House.

In the meantime, the Government must stop repackaging the compensation sums that they claim to be making available. For example, once we were able to analyse—and the farmers were able to identify—the precise nature of the supposed £40 million that was announced at the Conservative party conference, it turned out that less than £10 million in new money would reach the producers.

The forthcoming decision on hill livestock compensatory allowances will be crucial, because if there is not a substantial increase, especially in the ceilings that are put on the payments for cattle, there will be no adequate response to the deepening crisis in less-favoured areas. We need a substantial and sustained increase immediately—not next spring—for those in the disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged LFAs, especially to meet the crisis in the suckler herds.

Last week, the Midland bank report forecast a one eighth drop in the profitability of the agriculture industry as a whole—but that disguises a much deeper crisis in the livestock sector, as the industry is bolstered by a relatively happy situation in the cereal sector. There is worse to come. The lesson from the report must be that this is no time to put income tax cuts before the survival of a vital industry.

Much has been made in the debate this afternoon of the outcome of the Florence summit. I was surprised that the Minister made much play of the fact that we could not control the time scale, but did not refer to the Prime Minister's statement that

"It is now up to us to meet the conditions for lifting the ban".—[*Official Report*, 24 June 1996; Vol. 280, c. 21.]

That is how he kept hon. Members of the Euro-sceptic tendency in their place. He said that the time scale from then on was in the hands of the British Government and that we were no longer the victims of the whims of the French and German conservative Governments. The Minister did not mention that this afternoon—and we heard nothing about it from the Opposition Front Bench.

The Prime Minister specifically promised that the over-30-month cull backlog would be cleared by the end of October. I know that Roman emperors used to change the calendar for their convenience, but so far that has not happened here. He further promised that that would enable the accelerated slaughter scheme for potentially risky cohorts of cattle to be set in motion from the end of October—but here we are, well into November—and that the timetable was in the Government's hands. He bought off his Euro-sceptic fanatics, who suspected that his belligerent tactics on the continent had been a total failure, and said that the Government would be able to make the running from then on.

We now know that all those promises were worthless. Specialist beef producers throughout the United Kingdom are furious at being misled. I spent two and a half weeks in Scotland in September, meeting hundreds of beef producers and their union representatives, and I was left in no doubt that they are anxious that progress be made on the selective cull as quickly as possible. Before the BSE bombshell in March, 20 per cent. of their output was exported. I know the case that has been made for Northern Ireland; indeed, I referred to it this morning in European Standing Committee A.

Instead of producing the comprehensive working document on how the cull could work which the Minister and the Prime Minister undertook to produce after Florence, the Minister went back to the Council of Agriculture Ministers with nothing. The Commission and other member states want a good wad of paper that they can deal with and discuss at a technical level to ensure that the veterinary and medical significance is fully understood, but the Minister put the matter straight back into the political arena and invited a complete rejection. Perhaps that is what he wanted, because the Government could then blame Europe for what went wrong.

The Minister was sent back from Florence to do his homework, but he reappeared with pathetic excuses for more dither and delay. He was sent away with a flea in his ear, and the following day Commissioner Brittan had to try to pick up the pieces.

I hope that the Minister will tell us that the working document promised at Florence is now in an advanced state. We need a clear strategy covering the whole United Kingdom, to re-establish the British beef herd as BSE clear. The Minister again admitted this evening that he has not as yet any firm proposals for certified herds; that must surely be an integral part of the working document.

We need a phased, step-by-step BSE eradication plan, region by region and/or herd by herd. That is essential to rebuild confidence at home and abroad.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Tony Baldry): We heard the Labour party's current position this evening although, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) said, it was not entirely clear on the accelerated or selective cull. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will make it clear exactly where the Liberal party now stands on that.

Mr. Tyler: I am delighted to give the assurance that if the Minister produces a working document that sets out in detail and in practical terms an accelerated cull that will do the job, we will support it. So far, he has failed to do so, and his Ministry and the Prime Minister have failed to deliver. It is no wonder that people at home and abroad are beginning to distrust their promises and forecasts.

Mr. Paul Marland (West Gloucestershire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyler: No. I have already taken longer than I intended.

In answer to our debate on 13 May, the Parliamentary Secretary promised that the mature beef assurance scheme would be

"up and running by June."—[*Official Report*, 13 May 1996; Vol. 277, c. 735.]

It is now nearly eight months since we first suggested that necessity, and still the Ministry has failed to produce a workable, reliable scheme. Its first attempt was patently inadequate—it failed to impress European Ministers or the Commission, or to meet the facts of agricultural life here. For example, any link with holdings rather than with herds is irrational, unless Ministry scientists are reversing their previous advice and saying that BSE can be transmitted through the soil.

Ministers have managed to sour relationships with all our European partners and with the farming unions, so progress is painfully slow.

The House should consider carefully the admission in October by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster that

"in an emergency—which this is—you have to think the impossible."

I invite the House to compare the Government's response to this crisis with that of the Thatcher Government to the Falklands invasion in 1982, when with all-party support and within seven days the task force was mobilised. The current Government have taken seven months to get to the starting block. Under this Administration, the task force would never have left port.

If this is an emergency, why not seek emergency powers? Why not requisition plant and take control back from the Federation of Fresh Meat Wholesalers and the United Kingdom Renderers Association, by which Ministers have admitted being held over a barrel? The federation's memorandum of 23 May warned its members that if the way in which the over-30-month scheme was being mishandled became public, the Government might decide to

"take control of the cull".

Liberal Democrat Members have been ready and willing from the outset to try to achieve a consensus on the priorities. On several occasions, representing as we do rural Britain at so many levels of government, we have offered to work with Ministers to seek solutions. They have insisted on blundering on alone.

I notice that the Minister is in deep conversation with the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley). Perhaps he is seeking alliances in that respect, but he has

[Mr. Tyler]

made no attempt to talk to parties representing major livestock areas in this part of the country and on this side of the Irish sea.

I refer in particular to the family in my constituency of the late Robert Cowburn of St. Columb Road, in the heart of Cornwall. The coroner judged his suicide to have been the direct result of the hopeless situation in which the Government's mishandling of the crisis had left his beef herd.

Surely it is, even now, not too late for Ministers to swallow their pride and adopt a non-partisan national approach to this continuing national emergency.

5.40 pm

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): Like the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), I begin by declaring an interest in that I am a director of a company which has a subsidiary company which deals with feed mills and feed. It is a small part of our total turnover, but it is nevertheless there. I also have a much more general constituency interest.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister is not currently in the Chamber, but I understand, perhaps more than most, how immensely difficult it is to develop reasoned actions in handling these immensely difficult issues, when so often politics, emotion and alarmist headlines can dominate.

I shall not go over the background of the past few months—others have done that—but I start, as my right hon. and learned Friend did, by re-emphasising, as I think should be done every time we have a debate on this issue in the House or discuss it elsewhere, that British beef is safe.

It is fundamentally important that my right hon. and learned Friend started with that and re-emphasised it. Nothing can do our farmers more good than to keep thumping that message home. In my part of the world there is now robust acceptance of that message, and it has done a great deal to bring confidence back to the market.

Mr. Tony Banks: Did the company with which the right hon. Gentleman has an association ever produce cattle feed that contained animal protein?

Mr. MacGregor: The company was acquired only recently by the company of which I have recently become a director, but I believe that rigorous measures were in force from 1989 to deal with the feed mill issue. I have seen a great deal of the documentation that it produced for its employees to ensure that the original 1988 measures were adhered to.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister emphasised that British beef was safe, but the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) did not do so until he was asked a question. Had he not been asked a question, he would not have mentioned it at all. That leads me to the conclusion that what he was about this afternoon was playing party politics rather than trying to deal with the real situation.

Two issues now concern my farmers. The first is the reduction in the payments under the compensation scheme. What particularly angered them was the fact that it was not their fault that a number of cattle on their farms did not get into slaughter in time, and that therefore there was an element of retrospection in the way in which the matter was handled. I understand that the problem was that, because of the registration scheme, there was no way of identifying which cattle came into that category. I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister of State could confirm that when he replies, because it is the issue which, until recently, predominated in the discussions that I have had.

The main emphasis now is on the continuing uncertainty in relation to some aspects of the overall policy. The current progress on the 30-month slaughter scheme and on registration is immensely helpful. It has done a great deal to remove much uncertainty. The key area of uncertainty now is the accelerated and selective slaughter scheme, on which I want to concentrate.

I underline the point made by my right hon. and learned Friend, that we must be certain that we will benefit from the accelerated scheme before he embarks on implementing it, especially given the background that the rational case for it is weak. It is not scientifically justified, and it certainly does nothing to assist in dealing further with the food safety issues, which have all now been addressed and fully carried through by my right hon. and learned Friend.

Not only that, but the measures that I introduced as Minister of Agriculture, and other measures taken since then, have all led to the position in which the beef is safe. Therefore, the scheme is not scientifically justified from that point of view, and the recent measures that were taken after the statement of 20 March make that clear.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): The right hon. Gentleman says that the arguments for the second slaughter programme are weak, yet it is part of the Florence agreement, and when the Prime Minister returned from Florence in June he trumpeted that agreement, and the Minister of Agriculture said that the agreement was a great success and provided a solid way forward. Are not we going back on that agreement?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall come to that point later, because it is relevant to what my right hon. and learned Friend was saying this afternoon about how he assesses the mood in the European Council of Ministers. The case is not strong, and the point that I am making now is that we should not embark on it unless we are sure that we will get the benefits from it.

In addition to the cull not being scientifically justified, according to the Oxford *Nature* research, to which reference has already been made, we are already on course to eradicate BSE, as my right hon. and learned Friend made clear this afternoon. We believe that the measures that have been taken to deal with BSE will work and are the right ones, and that we are on course to eradicate it by 2001, or whatever.

An accelerated slaughter scheme would accelerate that by only a few months. So, again, it is not in itself justified in dealing with the problem. It will also mean that a considerable number of healthy, non-BSE-infected cattle will be slaughtered unnecessarily. It will also involve a substantial cost to the Exchequer and, just as significant—from the industry's point of view, more significant—a devastating and possibly unnecessary impact on many

farmers who have built up their herds after decades of hard work and now feel that they will have been cruelly dealt by if they see all that go by the board.

If such a scheme were to add to consumer safety, it would be justified, but it will not. We know that the measures that have already been taken over the years, including all the measures in the past few months, are the right ones to deal with consumer safety. Even the right hon. Member for Livingston admitted this afternoon that British beef is safe. Therefore, it is not justified from that point of view.

The accelerated slaughter scheme could be justified—I come now to the point—in terms of the cost to the industry and the taxpayer only if the benefits exceed the costs. That means not just lifting the ban, on which we seem to have focused this afternoon, but also seeing exports re-established. Those are two different things, and both are necessary.

What my right hon. and learned Friend said this afternoon about his assessment of the position in the EU is most important. Only he can judge the attitude in the Council of Ministers and the attitude of other Ministers. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) referred to what I think he called the gelatine test. So far, the failure of the gelatine test is not very encouraging. Therefore, my right hon. and learned Friend is right to be concerned to ensure that we will get the benefits if we go ahead with the scheme.

I was going to say that I suspect that there may be a hardening of attitude among some Ministers in other European states towards their part in fulfilling the Florence agreement—my right hon. and learned Friend nearly went as far as saying that, to some extent, there has been that hardening of attitude—and that therefore they may also be considering tightening the conditions further or raising new ones. If so, my right hon. and learned Friend is right to be cautious, and should resist and put the responsibility where it clearly lies.

My right hon. and learned Friend has already made the point that four of the five steps in the Florence agreement have been taken, which is significant progress. We need to be convinced that, in taking the fifth step, we will get the returns that are necessary for our farmers.

I am aware, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater said, that the numbers in the cohorts may be down from the 120,000 as a result of the 30-month scheme. Obviously, that will be the case. The numbers will come down. Therefore, in principle, the costs and the effect on the industry will be less if we go ahead with the scheme. The danger is that new conditions might be raised and those numbers therefore increased. That is why I support my right hon. and learned Friend's approach to the matter—it is right from the farming point of view.

My right hon. and learned Friend said that one way through might be to begin the scheme with the specialist herds, and possibly cattle born after 2 August 1996. That is a sensible way to proceed, because we can thus test whether the European Union will respond as it ought to. My right hon. and learned Friend needs to be sure that the European Union ban will be lifted and that no other types of restriction will be imposed on our exports—all the issues that are starting to emerge in respect of the gelatine test—before he embarks on the full ban scheme.

The House should reflect on this point: suppose we started on the scheme, but failed to get the right response from the European Union? We would have a very different debate from this one, and our farmers would feel very let down. The guarantees must be clear-cut and absolute. My right hon. and learned Friend's current way of tackling the issue is right, and, if he does not get those guarantees, he should announce that the scheme will not proceed. The sooner a decision is reached within the European Union, the better.

5.51 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): Unlike previous speakers, I have no financial interests to declare. I do not speak on behalf of the farmers of Newham. For the benefit of those hon. Members who think that I live in a concrete jungle, I should point out that many cattle once wandered on Wanstead flats, which is in my constituency, and it was a delight to see them. I have not seen them around recently, but I suppose that they have gone the way of all flesh.

I want to say a few words about the welfare of the creatures we are discussing tonight, which are being slaughtered in large numbers. The House is clearly overwhelmingly concerned about the welfare of farmers. I can understand that—farmers have votes, cattle and other animals do not. Indeed, if animals could vote, I am quite sure that I would have become Prime Minister by now.

I was appalled by the figures read out by the Minister—860,000 slaughtered so far, a backlog of 320,000 waiting to be slaughtered, we have now reached a weekly slaughter rate of 59,000, and that is all a matter for great congratulation. As far as I am concerned, it represents nothing more than a concentration camp regime for cattle.

Why are all those animals being massacred, and for what purpose? We have heard that there is no timetable from the European Union for an end to the ban—there is no end in sight, and no one can give any clear indication of whether there will be an end at all. How many cattle will have to be slaughtered? It might be that the European Union will not be satisfied until the whole national herd has been wiped out. In achieving that end, vast numbers of completely healthy cattle will be unnecessarily massacred. That is appalling from an economic point of view, but from an animal welfare point of view it is obscene.

The other point in the Minister's speech that appalled me was the fact that, so far, this exercise has cost the British taxpayer £263 million. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) talked about a conspiracy. I find it strange that, despite the fact that there was clearly a man-made cause of the disease which led to the crisis, no one will be prosecuted. No one will be blamed. We will not be able to recover any of that money from those responsible.

I hold farmers partly responsible—it is not necessary to have a great deal of knowledge to know that there will be a price to pay if herbivores are fed animal protein.

Mr. Tyler: What proof does the hon. Gentleman have that the average livestock farmer had any idea that animal protein was an ingredient? They were told only that there was a protein ingredient and they were usually told that it was fishmeal, even if it was not.

Mr. Banks: Even if it was fishmeal, that would not have been appropriate. When does the average cow eat fishmeal if it is grazing in a field? If any animal protein

[Mr. Banks]

is fed to a herbivore, there will be a price to pay. I might add that that is only the thin end of the wedge. If we consider all the ways in which we are interfering in nature for the sake of food production, we shall see that there are all sorts of problems in the pipeline, but it will be years before we find out how horrible our future might be.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I entirely agree with some of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. It is unethical, immoral, wasteful of money and unnecessary that all those animals should be slaughtered; but—bearing in mind the recent intervention from the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler)—surely the hon. Gentleman accepts that it was the European Union that encouraged increased agricultural production? The use of protein led to that end, so the European Union is to blame.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman could no doubt find a convenient way to blame the European Union for bad weather, or any other ill. No one can claim that they are totally innocent or that their hands are clean—no one, that is, except dedicated vegetarians like me, but that is of little consolation.

Human interference in nature worries me greatly, and it is still happening. We are currently dealing with one crisis, but how many more are waiting to be addressed as we interfere more and more with nature in trying to get higher and higher productivity? Look at the pesticides and herbicides we use, the poisons we pump out, and the way in which we genetically engineer fruits and vegetables. Nature is extremely unforgiving, and either we or our children and grandchildren will have to pay the price for our actions.

Let me return to the subject of animal welfare. We are approaching the winter, which brings colder and wetter weather. Even at the accelerated rate of slaughter, there will clearly not be enough housing on farms for the animals. How many animals will be left out in the fields in the winter months? Many farmers say that they cannot afford the extra £10 to £14 per week needed to feed animals through the winter. If farmers are able to bring their cattle in, welfare considerations come into play if those animals are kept in overcrowded conditions—the problems of mastitis, lameness and pneumonia will emerge.

We have to ask this question: if farmers know that cattle are waiting to be slaughtered, will they feed them properly?

Mr. Winterton: Yes.

Mr. Banks: I do not know how the hon. Gentleman can give the House that assurance, given how many farmers there are.

Will farmers be ready and able to meet the high veterinary bills resulting from problems of overcrowding? Farmers will be looking at an asset of diminishing value, so we have to ask ourselves whether they will be prepared to invest in it. I cannot believe that all of them will.

Apart from welfare problems on farms, there are reports of serious problems involving marketing, transport and pre-slaughter conditions. Around one third of cull cows are sold through markets. Last week, "Newsnight" showed a west country market selling cull cows to a dealer who was transporting them to Yorkshire for slaughter, yet there was an abattoir next door to the market. The abattoir in question was receiving cull cows from Yorkshire. What the hell is going on? Why are those cattle being moved around?

Nigel Taylor, a vet who saw those animals at the market, was appalled, and said that the animals could be "distressed and disturbed". The programme suggested that the over-30-months scheme had been hijacked by dealers, who paid backhanders to slaughterhouses to get their animals to the head of the queue. The Government have acknowledged that problem by introducing the new registration scheme, and I hope that we shall have regular reports on whether the scheme is addressing those abuses.

There are eye-witness accounts of cows calving as they wait their turn in the slaughterhouse. In September, one person saw about 60 cattle in a slaughterhouse at Crick in Northamptonshire. The animals had come from a market and were supposed to have been killed on the Wednesday; but the Ministry had called a halt to the killing, so they had to wait until the following Monday before being slaughtered.

Several animals were painfully thin. Others had udders that were grossly distended—they obviously required milking, but, of course, abattoirs do not have the facilities to milk cows, so the cows spent their last five days in severe pain. The matter was reported to the Ministry vet, whose response was, "What on earth can I do about it?" Others report overcrowded abattoir lairages with animals up to their bellies in muck. The staff say that they have no time to clean out the facility because, as soon as one lot is slaughtered, another lot comes in.

Let me talk about the calf slaughter scheme, officially known as the calf processing aid scheme, which was set up by the European Union four years ago. So far, it has been optional for Governments, but it could become compulsory. Farmers are paid to slaughter the young calves under the scheme. We adopted the scheme in late April, when the European Union refused to import our male dairy calves for their veal crate farms. It is a shame. It must be bad enough for the calves to find out that they are going to a veal crate, but when they think that there is a chance of being rescued, they find out the EU will not take them, so they are slaughtered. What appals me is the waste of animal resources as well as the welfare considerations.

To date, about 300,000 calves have been slaughtered under the scheme. It was originally intended for male dairy calves only, but it was extended to beef breed calves early this month, so numbers are likely to be increasing rapidly. The calves have to be slaughtered by the time they are 20 days old—it was originally 10—and the abattoir is paid £103.47 for each calf slaughtered. Further profits can be made from the by-products such as the hide, as well as by selling carcases to pet food manufacturers and maggot farms. The flesh is not allowed to be used for human consumption or for consumption by livestock, fish or horses.

Welfare concerns come to mind immediately. The calves are condemned animals, and, as I have said, I believe that they will receive minimal care on the farm. Certainly, an expensive—*[Interruption.]* I believe that that will be the case on many farms. I am just saying what

I believe. Given the pressures on farmers, I do not believe that they will be prepared to pay for expensive veterinary visits, because the cost would be uneconomic.

There is the question of transporting and marketing. Many of the calves are being sent to market and bought by dealers who shop around for the abattoir offering the best price. Some dealers are paying £101 for a calf, yet, as I have said, the subsidy to the abattoir is only £103.47. Are the abattoirs paying more than the subsidy for each calf? If so, how are they making a profit? There will obviously be a little bit extra from by-products, but can we be certain that none of those calves is ending up in the food chain?

There are many reports of calves being brought to market and sent on lengthy journeys to faraway slaughterhouses. We all know that young calves make poor travellers—the literature shows us that. We know of consignments that have gone from a west country market all the way to Scotland. It is appalling. Dealers are collecting calves and transporting them all over the country.

On 17 August, there was an advertisement in a west country newspaper, the *Western Morning News*, which called for calves of four to 10 days old. It talked about

"regular collections throughout Devon and Cornwall".

It is an offence to transport a calf of four days old, before the navel has healed. What action is being taken? Nothing is being done, because so many cowboys are operating. When a large amount of taxpayers' money is around, corruption always comes in.

The welfare considerations of the cattle have not been addressed in the House in the way they should. The concern is essentially for farmers, particularly those who are making a big noise. There are votes here. I did not just turn up in this place yesterday; I understand that votes are vital and concentrate the mind of every politician, but we should not be oblivious to the welfare of the animals that are being massacred, in many cases unnecessarily, in their hundreds of thousands.

The BSE crisis has been an example of appalling incompetence, particularly within the cattle cake manufacturing sector. They are the people who are responsible for this, and I want to see someone arraigned before the courts. If this had been in any other area of production, the producers would have been in the courts by now, and all sorts of heavy fines, if not imprisonment, would have been handed out. It has been an example of incompetence by the Government and the industry. It is about time the electorate were given the opportunity to carry out a political cull of the Government.

6.3 pm

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): The hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks) is right to be concerned about animal welfare, particularly over the next few months. We are all concerned about that, none more so than the farmers who have bred the animals.

There was a curious air of unreality about the opening speech of the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) which contrasted sharply with what my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) described as the realistic assessment of the situation in Europe presented by my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister.

It will come as no surprise to the House when I say that I wish to concentrate on Wales, although much of what I want to say will be applicable to other parts of the United Kingdom, except perhaps Newham.

Agriculture is very important to us in Wales. It is the backbone of our rural economy and the prosperity of life in the countryside is highly dependent on it. The beef sector is an essential element of that. I met my farmers during the long recess and when they came to Westminster on the opening day of this parliamentary Session. I know at first hand of the problems they face on farms, in the market and even in the abattoirs and elsewhere.

There was a backlog of 30-month-old cattle which grew during the summer months as the farmers failed to get them slaughtered. There is no doubt that Wales is particularly handicapped by its lack of rendering capacity and our animals had to be taken over the border after slaughter. Progress was abysmally slow. Some extra facilities have been brought into play and the pace of the cull has undoubtedly quickened. However, there is still a lot of cattle on farms awaiting slaughter. I am glad that more carcases are now being diverted to cold storage and that precedence is being given to registered animals.

Wales has 14 per cent. of the total England and Wales backlog and I welcome the measures taken to deal with that. During the recess, the process was so slow that my farmers were actively discussing the possibility of incinerating carcases in disused quarries and elsewhere. I hope that we shall not embark upon an accelerated cull, as proposed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), before we have disposed of the backlog. We can talk about it and think about it along the lines advocated by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk. I thought that what he said about the accelerated cull made good sense.

The effect of the backlog, coupled with the low market price, has meant that farmers have been unable to restock this autumn as they would have wished. Their incomes have been hit badly, not only this year but for the year to come. It is important to bear that in mind.

Most of Wales is hill farming country. It is 80 per cent. less-favoured area and there is considerable dependence on the livestock compensatory allowances, which, as I understand it, have fallen in value over the past four years. Therefore, I plead with the Government to be as generous as possible with those payments this year. If they are not, many farming enterprises will go under and those that survive will be left wondering whether there is any future in farming for them and their families and whether we in this House really care.

Few could understand the Brussels decision to reduce by 10 per cent. the basic payment under the over-30-months scheme. No one will understand it if the hill livestock compensatory allowances are not up to expectations, and are niggardly at this time of deep crisis and acute need in the farming industry.

Mr. Home Robertson: The right hon. Gentleman said that it was a Brussels decision to cut compensation payments. He should understand that that decision was taken by the British Government.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I understand that it was a Brussels decision. It was certainly taken in Brussels. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] It was taken in Brussels.

[Sir Wyn Roberts]

We have talked a great deal about consumer confidence in beef. We are now talking about farmers' confidence in themselves and their enterprises. It is vital that that confidence be maintained and sustained through the HLCAs to be announced later this month. I warn the Government that there will be justifiable anguish if the uprating is inadequate.

There is no doubt in my mind that we must eradicate BSE—that has been my position from the outset, but it is easier said than done, especially in the absence of complete and definitive science. The incompleteness of our knowledge and its emergence in dribs and drabs have been responsible for many of our difficulties, along with what I describe as the vagaries of European Union opinion. That BSE must be eradicated is now generally accepted. Scientists are urging a similar policy on scrapie in our sheep flocks, and I do not dissent from that view. Meat for human consumption must be above suspicion. However, I do not underestimate the enormity of the tasks and the length of time that they will take. Mercifully, the end of BSE is in sight as a result of the measures adopted by the Government.

It is also clear that while measures are taken to achieve the objective of clean herds and flocks, the farming community must be financially supported or it may lose heart, which would be a sad day for all of us. I fully appreciate the magnitude of the Government's financial commitment—£2.5 billion. I also appreciate the fact that they have already allocated £60 million to hill farmers, although I am not sure how that will be distributed.

I am aware of the tremendous personal efforts made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) and his colleagues on the Front Bench, who were faced with a daunting situation that might have floored lesser men. They are to be commended for their courage, pertinacity and dogged pursuit of their policy objectives.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) referred to the rapid reaction to the Falklands crisis. We were dealing with the Argentines with our own forces. The BSE problem facing the farming industry is very different. It takes time for agricultural measures to take effect.

I am sure that the Government will persevere and rally the farming community behind them. I hope that they will also have the full support of their colleagues in the Treasury and other Departments, including the Ministry of Defence, which is feeding our troops with foreign beef. There have been protests in Wales—I am sure that the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) is aware of them, as is the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames), because he listened to representations from the farming industry. A change would help to restore and buttress confidence, as would the return of beef to our school menus. Believe it or not, in parts of the Principality—even rural parts—beef is still not on the school menu.

It is clear that the Opposition are milking the beef crisis for all it is worth. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is right to describe their behaviour as cynical political opportunism at the expense of the farming industry. Naturally, the Opposition are quick to fault the Government at every step in the long process towards the eradication of BSE, but it is by no means clear after today's debate what they would have done had they been in office. They are not clear about what they would do, even with the hindsight that they have now. They are naive in the extreme to think that more could have been done to lift the European ban, especially when the European beef industry as a whole was suffering a severe crisis of consumer confidence.

The right hon. Member for Livingston gave the game away when he referred to the decline in beef sales in France, Germany and elsewhere. Surely that proves that there was a lack of confidence in French, German and Italian beef, as well as in British beef, which was not subsequently exported to those countries.

Mr. Marland: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the lack of confidence in beef in Europe is due to the fact that there is no system similar to ours for tracing BSE? All too often, when a cow in France looks as if it has a BSE problem, it is diagnosed by the vet as having backache. The farmer is advised to get it to the market and into the food chain as quickly as possible, so that the whole affair can be covered up.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I agree with my hon. Friend. We have supreme confidence in our beef industry, and in the safety of our beef products. That is not paralleled in European countries, where consumers have more doubts than British consumers.

The Government have taken the right measures in difficult circumstances. The proof of that is that the end of the BSE scourge is in sight. Opposition Members have given the impression that somehow or other the crisis could have been solved overnight. Measures to eradicate BSE require time, and the industry requires time to work those measures through.

6.18 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): The Minister of Agriculture began his speech by saying that the BSE crisis was a disaster for British agriculture. I hope that he will reconsider those words and accept that it is a disaster not only for British agriculture, but for a wider spectrum of our economy. The ancillary industry employs a vast number of people—far more than the numbers employed on beef production in farms—who have also suffered grievously. We must keep in the forefront of our minds the problems that those people have faced, many of whom have lost their livelihoods as a result of the crisis.

In Florence the Prime Minister, the Government and the country signed up, if not to a timetable, to a sequence of events leading to a progressive lifting of the beef ban. I say that in the most charitable way that I can: whenever we start talking about timetables, the perspective, or the meaning, seems to change. In any event, although we may not have signed up to a particular month, I believe that we certainly signed up to a result that was clearly understood by all. Although we are all happy that four of the five measures agreed to at that time have now been implemented—or nearly implemented—we are concerned about the remaining principle of the cull, which has not yet been carried out. We look forward to the day when a certified herd scheme will operate throughout the United Kingdom.

I am glad that in Northern Ireland—and, apparently, throughout the United Kingdom—all cattle destined for slaughter are now registered and given a measure of

priority. I have always felt that the Government should have taken control of the situation. I know that there were manpower difficulties at the start, but a large number of retired officials could have been brought back on an emergency basis to set up and run the scheme. That would have avoided all the problems encountered by farmers, and all the rumours of fraud, backhanders and so forth that have so plagued the scheme. The mere fact that the Government have now had to take over the whole system of registering cattle for slaughter means that the view of those such as my local farmers union was entirely correct.

I hope that the slaughter of the 90,000 cattle that remain in Northern Ireland will soon be carried out, but it cannot be carried out unless some of those cattle leave Northern Ireland to be slaughtered elsewhere. That means that they must cross the water to Great Britain. I hope that the Minister can tell us whether that will be possible, because we all want the backlog in the entire United Kingdom to be cleared very soon.

Another point that the Minister and the Government seem to be trying to ignore is that, so far as the Common Market countries are concerned, the only show in town is the certified herd scheme. Having listened with interest to all that has been said here today, I simply cannot understand why the detailed papers have not been presented, because that is the key. Is it because the Government are not prepared to continue the accelerated slaughter scheme, which would have to follow on from the clearance of the current backlog involving cattle aged over 30 months?

My hon. Friends and I appreciate that those in the rest of the United Kingdom may not know where the cattle intended for accelerated slaughter actually are. They may not know which beasts are involved, and on which farms they are located. In Northern Ireland, however, we know which cattle are involved and where they are. As I pointed out in an intervention on the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King)—a former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—in recent months the number has dropped by some 300 to 1,700.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I understand that the most recent figure is nearer 400.

Mr. Ross: If the number is dropping as fast as that, it is excellent news. The cattle, however, are scattered over Northern Ireland. Although in theory one day's slaughtering would deal with the lot, it would actually take about a fortnight to gather them all up and get them through the slaughterhouses. We hope that an effort will be made to do that very soon; once it is done, Northern Ireland will have fully met the requirements of the Florence agreement.

The Minister said in his speech that there was no credible cull policy that would accelerate a national clear-up of BSE. I assume that that is one of the reasons for his current difficulties with our colleagues in the European states. He also pointed out that, despite all the work done by the United Kingdom, there had been no favourable response from those other countries. If the situation regarding the attitude of the other EC countries is as bad as the Minister believes, it is time to test their good faith. In Northern Ireland, and to a lesser extent in Scotland, the mechanism is to hand, although I understand that Commissioner Fischler has indicated that Scotland would not be accepted as speedily as Northern Ireland in that regard. In Northern Ireland, the cattle can be identified, the whole thing could be cleared up in a matter of weeks, and we would then know whether Europe was prepared to accept the measures that we have signed up to.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: May I make two brief points? The first relates to the backlog. We hope to be able to increase throughput to around 8,000 per week in the fairly near future. Beyond that, of course, the backlog needs to be cleared in a UK-wide context: we are as anxious as the hon. Gentleman is for the backlog in the Province to be cleared.

As for the extent to which the European Commissioner and his officials have been involved in discussions on the specialist herds, the beef assurance scheme and the certified herds, we have had detailed discussions on the basis of detailed papers. The Commissioner and the officials understand very well that Northern Ireland will fall readily into both the beef assurance and the certified herd schemes. It seems to me that any proposals that we present are likely to bring early benefit, in so far as benefit is possible, for Northern Ireland. I direct what I have said to the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) as well, as I know that he has the same anxieties.

Mr. Ross: We all know these things. There is nothing new in what the Minister has said. What we want to know is whether he is going to test the good faith of those in Europe. If we are not prepared to do that, what is the use of all these words? We have an instrument to hand—or a weapon, if hon. Members wish me to use a stronger term—which we can use to extract from Europe the concessions that we need. The plain truth is that, no matter what system we use, the very first area of the United Kingdom that will be able to meet the requirements is Northern Ireland—followed rapidly, I believe, by many parts of Scotland, under the certified herd scheme. We all understand that, but when will Europe's good will be tested?

To go a little further down the same road, can the Minister tell us whether, when we reach the happy point at which we believe that the Florence criterion has been met, the Standing Veterinary Committee can itself lift the ban? The Minister shakes his head, but I understand that the decision on tallow and gelatine never went back to the Council of Ministers: it was lifted following a request, or a ruling, from the committee.

Let us look at the time scale. If the scheme must be considered by the committee, it will probably want to look at it for two or three months, and it may then have to return to the Council of Ministers. Does the scheme have to go back to the Council of Ministers? Will we be subjected to one delay after another, carrying the thing on until perhaps after a general election, before final decisions are taken? If so, all the problems that the hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks) mentioned, including the feeding of cattle over the winter, will have to be faced. The Minister cannot wriggle out of these problems. We all appreciate his difficulties in dealing with Europe, but these are crunch issues and we need answers to them today.

The flagging of holdings is basically a Northern Ireland problem only. The Minister and Baroness Denton of Wakefield at the Northern Ireland Office are well apprised

[Mr. Ross]

of the difficulties surrounding the issue. He knows that there is a unique problem in relation to flagged suckler herds. Farmers expect to sell their calves by this time every year. If they try to sell them at present, however, they are immediately flagged up in the market as calves from herds that have had some contact with BSE, with the result that no one in the buyers' end of the market wants to know.

Farmers do not have the feed to carry progeny over the winter. Next year's calves have already been born and the rest will be born in the next few months, to be sold, farmers expect, next autumn. There must be some way out, some scheme to help those 300 farmers in Northern Ireland. I am sure that Members representing Wales and Scotland will be aware of the same difficulty, although a slightly different aspect of it may concern them. That problem concerns us in Northern Ireland. We need sensible answers to help that small group of farmers in the hills of Northern Ireland.

6.31 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross), who has a broad knowledge of agriculture and of rural affairs, as he has demonstrated again today.

My right hon. and hon. Friends and I felt that the opening speech by the Opposition spokesman was a political act of scaremongering. He spoke with much hindsight, was negative and did not say how the Labour party would handle the crisis in future, if in power. We know that we have had a difficult six months. As a farmer, I have been involved at first hand in the problems of, say, the over-30-month scheme and the calves scheme. I have heard the problems that my constituents have, as farmers, in getting their beasts to slaughterhouses. It has been a difficult time for them. They were particularly cross at the reduction in the value of the OTMS in October. Those in the queue felt hard done by that they had missed the deadline by a few days, as I did when the date for the topping-up of heifers occurred in July.

Mr. Tyler: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the Minister was wrong in saying just now that the reduction was made on the initiative of the European Commission in Brussels? In fact, the initiative came from Her Majesty's Government.

Sir Hector Monro: I will not confirm it because I do not know. This was all part of the fact that the European Community ecu had to be reduced, which was tied in with the value of the green pound. It was Europe's decision as much as ours.

Mr. Tyler: May I just separate those two issues? The 3 per cent. reduction was the result of the green pound devaluation—the right hon. Gentleman is correct there—but the 10 per cent. reduction, which took place before that, was on the initiative of Ministers.

Sir Hector Monro: The hon. Gentleman has made his point. Whoever made the reduction, it was unfortunate that it had to be made at all, because the prime beef market had been slowly recovering. The price was approaching around 100p per kilogram and farmers felt a little better for that. They took it hard when the OTMS was reduced.

I thank the Ministers who have been involved. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and Lord Lindsay have spent much time trying to resolve problems and to help. Both were at the recent Council meeting with my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and his colleagues. Ministers have left no stone unturned in trying to resolve the problem, which came out of the blue in March. It is not right for Opposition Members to criticise Ministers, because the problem came as a big surprise in March.

Much had to be put in place quickly to try to save the industry, which the Government have done. We have had our knocks, prices are down and there are still problems. Considering what occurred, however, we have got through the summer and autumn better than many people thought we would. The Opposition are carping in not accepting the huge amount of money that the Government have put into the BSE problem—£2.5 billion. A Labour Government would never have considered putting up so much money to help farmers.

The trend is right, but the overall issue is that the priority is to get the ban lifted and exports re-established. It is no use flying kites—as many people do for one thing and another—which might or might not help. We should not take any step unless we are absolutely convinced that it is the right way to get the ban lifted on the continent, and we must receive an assurance from the continent that it will accept what we are doing towards gaining 100 per cent. consumer confidence again.

The Prime Minister and the Government were right at Florence. Five out of the six points have been cleared. The critical issue is still the selective cull. We shall never get the ban lifted until we conduct a form of selective cull. The continentals are not prepared to accept anything less. It may not be prudent or justified, but they believe that it is essential and it will take a miracle to change their position.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my right hon. Friend agree that some people, the Germans in particular, are so keen to ruin our beef industry that even if we offered them heaven tomorrow they would not agree?

Sir Hector Monro: I fear that my hon. Friend is right. Whatever we do—even if we had conducted a selective cull in the past few months—it would still not be accepted by the Germans and probably not by the French or the Belgians either. They are not considering the matter scientifically. Sadly, they have a totally irrational attitude, with their own home beef production at the forefront of their minds.

I sometimes wonder where we are in terms of science. In March, we based policy firmly on Edinburgh and the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee; yet we were prepared to accept, on relatively little scientific evidence, the view of Oxford scientists this summer. Do the Government have a policy on whose scientific evidence we should use and what science is under consideration at present? Which universities or establishments are working specifically on BSE and trying to produce an answer that will help farmers and Britain?

Some things that come out in the night in scientific journals are singularly unhelpful and often leave much to be desired in terms of what most people would feel was fair comment.

During the summer, like many hon. Members, I spent a lot of time with farmers. I toured around Scotland to talk to them and to members of the National Farmers Union, listening to their problems and to what mattered most in terms of their practical problems. They always talked about the 30-month cull, but the Government have now got on top of the problems associated with that, and well done to them. I know that it took a long time to take all the relevant factors into account, especially those relating to the rendering industry.

I have been worried about casualties, but I have received letters of confidence from Lord Lindsay that they must have priority at all slaughterhouses. I hope that that turns out to be true because there must not be any worries about animal welfare.

In Scotland, we are all pleased that the threat of BSE is falling away rapidly. I suspect that there will be under 1,000 new cases this year. That is good news. Given the present rate of cull, I should have thought that a further selective cull need involve only a small number of animals to meet the required criteria.

Bearing in mind what the hon. Member for Londonderry, East has said, we must be careful about opting for regional policy, with Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales going their separate ways. I believe that it is very much better to stick together to try to get the ban lifted universally. I know that Ireland is way ahead of us on computerised traceability. It is a complicated procedure, and all credit to Ireland for having built it up over the years, but I do not believe that universal computerised traceability would impact on the present ban. It would take a long time to put similar schemes into operation in Scotland, England and Wales, so it is not something to which we can give great priority at the moment.

We must look at the good news—the Government have put £2.5 billion into agriculture and an extra £6.6 million towards cold storage facilities. It is true that we have been concerned about the long distances that beasts have been taken to be put into cold store. Once again, it is also important to consider the additional costs involved, because under the OTM scheme farmers have to pay for the transport. A farmer may believe that his beasts have been taken to the slaughterhouse a couple of miles down the road, so it is quite a surprise when he receives the bill and discovers that they went to south Wales. It is important to try to keep the slaughter of beasts as near as possible to their farms.

I was pleased at the announcement of £60 million for the cattle component of the hill livestock compensatory allowance. That is important and will build up the suckler cow subsidy to a significant sum. I take into account what the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said about less-favoured areas, which are an important consideration. I know that this year has been one of particular difficulties for hill farms. The hill farming review is currently being conducted and it is shortly expected to announce that there has been a significant drop in incomes. In the light of that, it would be a major disappointment if there were a drop in the sheep component of the HLCA. I hope that it will be possible to see it increased, because if ever a sector of farming needed confidence and support it is that of the true hill farmer.

I was glad to hear on 8 October about the further significant sum of money to be devoted to help overcome the BSE crisis. I look forward to hearing from my hon. Friend the Minister of State where that money will go. I believe that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister said that it is intended to pay for additional help with beef marketing, but I hope that a further explanation will be offered when my hon. Friend winds up the debate.

In the long term, I am worried about whether we intend to continue the 30-month cull. Are we making progress with the slow maturing breeds? How are we getting on with the certified herds scheme? Farmers are itching to know what is to happen about those issues now and in the coming year. I cannot see the ban being lifted for some months, so we must know how we shall be placed next spring, summer and autumn. Will there be a sufficient supply of prime beef, and what will the price be? What advice is the Meat and Livestock Commission giving to the Government about the future?

I do not think that we can sustain beef production at 100p per kilo. Somehow or other prices must increase if beef production is to be profitable again. We have got over the problems of the summer because of various schemes and assistance provided by the Government, but we appreciate that that cannot go on for ever. We must build a settled, long-term future for a profitable beef industry because it represents a major part of the agriculture industry, particularly in Scotland and Wales. The current drop of one third in the value of prime steer is a serious loss.

I am extremely concerned about the current import ban that Spain has imposed on lambs aged over six months, and I hope that a brief mention will be made about that tonight by my hon. Friend the Minister of State. That means that all lambs born in this country in spring and early summer that would have gone to Spain are banned from there because of their age. That is serious and I hope that we can put a diplomatic boot into Spain and say that we will not accept the ridiculous approach that it has taken up in recent weeks.

Whatever it takes, and whatever the cost, we must put all our efforts into getting the current beef ban lifted. That means reaching an agreement on the continent, which will be our major difficulty in the coming months. We have all agreed that beef is safe. We want to see it eaten at schools, in homes, and restaurants and sold at McDonald's and supermarkets. We must strive to market it in case we do not succeed in getting the ban lifted in the foreseeable future.

The letter from the National Farmers Union rightly pointed out that farmers appreciate the support that they have been given by the Government. They also know that they currently receive significant aid for livestock, and great support through arable aid. They know that the Government are deeply involved in rural affairs. I also think that farmers believe that this is no time for change, and they would regret it if they helped to bring that about.

6.46 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): A serious problem in Britain in agriculture almost inevitably becomes a serious crisis in the north of Ireland. I make

[Mr. Seamus Mallon]

that distinction because of the structure of the industry there and the scale of dependency in the north of Ireland not just on agriculture, but especially on the beef industry.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the right hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), answering on behalf of the Government in a recent Adjournment debate, agreed that the current crisis was

"one of the greatest setbacks in the past 150 years."—[*Official Report*, 16 October 1996; Vol.282, c.752.]

The permanent secretary in the Department of Agriculture in the north of Ireland is reported to have said

"I think there has been nothing like this since the famine."

Those are crisis words, but they are not an exaggeration when one looks at how dependent the north of Ireland is on the beef industry. Consider that 5 per cent. of its gross domestic product derives from agriculture as opposed to 2 per cent. in the rest of Britain. If we add food processing and agricultural input supply to that figure, it rises to 8 per cent. That represents a huge dependency on the beef industry. Consider, too, that 10 per cent. of Northern Ireland's work force are engaged in agriculture and ancillary industries. Of those employed in the north of Ireland, 40,000 are employed in the agricultural industry. The output for finished cattle and calves is worth about £400 million per annum, which is equivalent to slightly more than £1 million per day. Those facts about the small, mixed economy of the north of Ireland clearly demonstrate its absolute dependency on the beef industry and the scale of the crisis.

There is also a difference between the importance of beef exports in the north of Ireland and in England, Scotland and Wales. England, Scotland and Wales import beef to meet their needs. Therefore, they can more easily withstand the effects of BSE.

Mr. Welsh: No, we cannot.

Mr. Mallon: I realise the difficulties of having one's economy tied into a wider economy, but that is a problem for the Scots.

The beef trade is of greater relevance to the north of Ireland, which exports almost all its beef and cannot sustain a beef industry in the face of a worldwide export ban. That is the difference, and that is the problem. About 80 per cent. of the beef production of Northern Ireland is exported: 30 per cent. to Britain, and 50 per cent. to the rest of Europe. Suddenly to close off the market for 50 per cent. of production spells trouble for an already depleted economy.

Sir Jim Spicer (West Dorset): We are all anxious that the ban should be lifted. However, does the hon. Gentleman believe that the same scale of exports—or any exports—would automatically resume the next day if the ban were to be lifted? I am speaking particularly about France, because we do not sell much beef to Germany. Even if the ban were lifted, would not those continental countries—I use that phrase advisedly—continue to ban our beef products, by hook or by crook?

Mr. Mallon: I do not know, but I should like to put them to the test, and there is only one way in which to do that: by ensuring that there is no argument left against our position. Then we will find out. We must revert to the seriousness of the problem in the north of Ireland.

Mr. William Ross: Surely the hon. Gentleman is as well aware as I am of the strong signs from some countries in Europe, and also from South Africa, that they would willingly buy Northern Ireland beef once the ban is lifted.

Mr. Mallon: I believe that that would be the case, but I always prefer to have something proved than to take the word of someone about it. The hon. Gentleman—who, politically, comes from the same place as I do—can understand that one becomes conditioned to accepting not a person's words but the deeds that accompany them. I have every confidence that beef from the north of Ireland will sell, that it will sell in Europe and that it will sell as well as before. I want to prove that, to ourselves and to everyone else.

The incidence of BSE is remarkably different in different areas, and I have gone to some lengths to check the figures. Between 1988 and 1996, there have been 163,000 identified cases of BSE in England, Scotland and Wales. In the Republic of Ireland—I make no political point here—there have been 143 identified cases. In the north of Ireland, per head of herd, there have been 0.004 identified cases. Something in those figures should tell us something.

The figures tell us, first, that the control system in Ireland, north and south—although I am speaking only about the north of Ireland—has been very effective. It has been effective and efficient because of the farm quality assurance scheme, to which 75 per cent. of main producers subscribe, as do supermarkets in the north of Ireland. The scheme is unique in its identification and traceability system, which does not yet exist in England, Scotland or Wales. It has also been at the forefront in dealing with, and anticipating, the problems that have accrued—not so much in Scotland, but very much in England and Wales, and, minimally, on the island of Ireland. A high standard of protection is in place.

We have one other great advantage, which I believe is the key advantage in negotiations and in solving the problem. We have a sea around us. We are ring-fenced by sea. Surely that must have some influence on the low incidence figures, which I believe I can support. Surely that must be taken into account when we consider how we will solve the problem. I am not arguing that we are different, better or separate, but that we have been different in the approach we have taken to the problem of controlling disease and to our agricultural industry. Out of necessity—our dependence on the industry and the market—we have been more attentive to the market and to our products.

I do not suggest for one moment that anyone or any area should suffer because of the unique situation in the north of Ireland. But, as I know almost every hon. Member would agree, the north of Ireland should not be made to suffer because it has exceeded other regions in protecting its beef and beef production. That would be the unkindest cut of all. The heart of the hurt among the farming community in the north of Ireland is the belief that—after having done it right and produced the product in manner that is relatively BSE free—we are suffering as if those achievements had never occurred.

I have great admiration for the efforts made by the Minister with responsibility for the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, during a harrowingly difficult time. She has had to cope with Whitehall; she has had to cope with Europe; she has had to cope with the farming industry in crisis; and she has had to cope with us, the hon. Members from the north of Ireland. I pay tribute to her work, dedication and sense of justice—which was very potently demonstrated during the problems over the continuing backlog.

I make three suggestions. The first is that, whatever the merits or demerits of the Florence agreement, only a small step is now required to ensure that beef from the north of Ireland can re-enter the European market, and that would involve the culling of 1,724 cohorts. In his most recent intervention, however, I was reassured to hear the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) say that a more accurate figure would be about 400 cattle, because of the culling that has already occurred. The figure is only 400 cattle. They could be culled before 1 o'clock tomorrow, and then nothing would then stand in the way of north of Ireland beef going straight into the European market. Is that an unreasonable request? Once the selective cull of those 400 cattle is accomplished, a certified herd scheme can immediately be implemented in the north of Ireland.

Secondly, because of the 30-month cull scheme problems, there is a differential between what people might have received for their cattle on the morning before 31 October and what they would receive today. I sought professional advice on this before the debate and was told that for normal beef cattle at this time of year, anything up to £346 an animal can be lost. There is not only a loss on the animal but the added expenditure on feed and the difficulties that that causes, especially for the smaller producer.

My last point relates to hill livestock compensatory allowances, which are crucial to the north of Ireland economy. A huge part of the north of Ireland qualifies for the scheme. Many people depend on the compensatory amounts to be able to continue in the industry, but they have been reduced by whomsoever over the past two years on the grounds that farmers had done better. What farmers had been doing beforehand, of course, was not evaluated in relation to other incomes. Due to the problems facing those farmers, there is a very strong argument for ensuring an immediate and substantial increase in HLCAs, so that people are able to see themselves and their industry out of the problems.

I fully agreed with the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) when he referred to the flagged herd. Flagging the farm as opposed to the herd is unique to the north of Ireland and other parts of Britain. It means that the suckler herd farmer simply cannot give away his stock once it is flagged. I am told that we are talking about 300 farmers who need to be bailed out. There is no short-term palliative. I am also told that only a very small amount of money would enable those people to start again, build up their herds and get back into the industry without such a millstone, which they will never be able to remove alone, hanging around their necks.

I ask the Government to listen carefully to those points. I think that they are important and I know that they will be elaborated on. Every single public representative in the north of Ireland has been working with other parties, Members of the European Parliament, the Minister, farming unions and people on the ground to try to resolve the problem. They can only go so far. We can make progress only by the type of informed Government decisions about which I hope we shall hear very soon.

7.2 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): This is a very sobering and sombre debate for the representatives of Northern Ireland. We are not engaged in any party-political endeavour. Whatever others in the House are about—it is their business, and rightly so—we are dealing with a crisis, as the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) has underlined. I shall not go into the statistics.

In evidence given by the banks to the forum for political dialogue in Ulster, it has emerged that £70 million has already been lost out of our economy in Northern Ireland. I heard the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) ask about next year. Next year—indeed, next summer—we are not going to have a beef industry because, as the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh has just said, we depend on our exports. Scotland will survive, although not well; England will survive and, perhaps, do a little better; but we cannot survive because we can sell only 25 per cent. of what we produce to our people. We have to sell the rest outside the country, and at least 50 per cent. of that goes to an area that is now prohibited to us. The door is shut, the chains are up and the locks are in.

I have some experience in Europe, for I have been a Member of the European Parliament since direct elections were introduced. We are not going to wake up one morning and hear an announcement that the ban has been completely lifted. That is not going to happen. If any hon. Member thinks that, by any way we move in this House, that will happen, they are living in cuckoo land.

Sir Jim Spicer *indicated assent.*

Rev. Ian Paisley: I notice that the hon. Gentleman, who has had wide experience of Europe too, nods his head in approval.

How are we going to get out of the difficulty? What plan can we adopt that can get us out of the difficulty? The only plan than we can adopt is realistically to face up to the fact that, if the ban is going to be broken, it will be broken only piecemeal. Hon. Members might not like to hear that. Nobody believes in the Union more than I do. The matter is not about setting one part of the United Kingdom against another. Frankly, if Scotland, England or Wales were in the position that we in Northern Ireland are in, I would be advocating that they immediately go ahead, start to move and get some water over the dam. If we get a break, we can bring others with us. Some hon. Members might not like Northern Ireland carrying the flag in this instance, but they will have to face up to it at the end of the day. We had better all realise that—and quickly.

Why do I say this? We have heard that we have difficulties in Europe. I am not pro-European, as everybody knows; I know that there are difficulties with Europe. There are two kingpins to our problem, however, with whom we do not have difficulties: the Agriculture Commissioner and the chairman of the Council of Ministers, who happens at the moment to be the Agriculture Minister of the Republic of Ireland.

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

Commissioner Fischler met the three Members of the European Parliament who represent Northern Ireland—me and my two colleagues, the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and the former Member for Newry and Armagh, Mr. Nicholson—and representatives of the unions. I asked: "Will you tell me, Commissioner, what Northern Ireland has to do to come up to the standard that you say you have in Europe?" What was his answer? He said, "You are far beyond that standard." How can we justify a ban on Northern Ireland beef in Europe if we are far more advanced than Europe on the matter? I would like the Government to press that matter with vigour.

I was greatly disappointed and disheartened by the Minister's answer when the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) asked why we are not pressing on with the certification scheme. The Minister replied, "Look, we have talked about this. We have had some papers, but we do not have the working papers yet." I then intervened. I asked the same question and got the same reply. Then the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) asked the same question, and he got the same reply. We did not get anywhere.

Tonight, the Minister has spoken again. As the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) said, we have heard it all before. I want to ask the Government some plain questions. Are they going to block this road? Are they going to press for the certified herd scheme? Are they going to push the issue? How soon will they make a decision? I understand that they have not yet made a firm decision. Until they do, we shall not know what the outcome will be. I urge them to make a firm decision.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh talked about what stands between us and the market that we want. He was right. The animals are one obstacle. There are many others. The hon. Member for East Londonderry took me up wrongly before, and I want to put the figures on the record. He said that some 300—of 1,700—cattle had already been slaughtered. I checked, and found that 400 have now been slaughtered. About 1,300 beasts stand in the way of our meeting the Florence requirements for a cull.

A tremendous number of animals have already been slaughtered: 56,000 steers and heifers and 25,000 cows—a total of more than 80,000. Only 1,300 cattle are now standing in the way. Surely the Government should proceed.

Someone said that the debate was about what Europe had done. The Prime Minister accepted the Florence agreement. He may ask whether I accept it or whether the House accepts it, but that is not the question. He accepted it. It was sold as a very good deal. We were told that there was a calendar with this very good deal. That calendar has come and gone and we are nowhere. Would it not be right for the Government to say, "Right, we shall bring Northern Ireland up as far as the cull is concerned"?

The second matter to be dealt with is whether the number of cases of BSE in Northern Ireland is going down or up. If we still have serious levels of BSE in Northern Ireland, should it not be looked at? The good news is that BSE has peaked in Northern Ireland. In 1988 we had three cases. In 1989 we had 30. In 1990 we had 100. In 1991 we had 170. In 1992 we had 333. In 1993 we had 487. In 1994, the number went down to 360, and it has gone down again in 1995 and this year. The number is going down; we are not experiencing an increase. I am not making a political point, but the south of Ireland has had an increase while we have not.

The secret of the difference between us and the rest of the United Kingdom is simple—we do not have a land border; we have water around us. We can safeguard ourselves. Everyone knows that we have always had the best possible animal health standards because we are ringed by water. We have a case to be put.

I am sorry about what has happened, because Mr. Fischler and Mr. Yates, the two key men, told my two colleagues in the European Parliament—the hon. Member for Foyle and Mr. Nicholson—and me only a few days ago that they needed an application from the British Government. They need the Government to ask for it.

Hon. Members have talked about testing Europe. Let us test Europe. Mr. Yates will soon be going out of office, but he has assured us that he has already talked to his replacement from the Netherlands, who is of the same opinion. We used to export a lot of beef to the Netherlands. The Netherlands accepts Ulster beef. It was asked in the House today whether, if the ban was lifted, we would get these markets. We would have to go and fight for them. They are not waiting for us, but there are certain places where we have good will, and the Netherlands is one. We want to be able to help them out by giving them the best possible beef.

The House and the Government must take steps to get the papers and make the application. On European matters, it has often been necessary to persuade the chairman of the Council and the Commissioner. They do not need any persuasion. They are already of the opinion that the matter can be dealt with regionally. Swine fever in Germany was dealt with regionally. It was dealt with inside one country. One of the directives gives the ability to do that. We need to adopt that approach.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): It may seem that some of us have just come in, but we have been watching the hon. Member through the medium of our new televisions. I have listened carefully to what he has said. A lifting of the ban in Northern Ireland would begin to break the logjam. My farmers in Yorkshire, many of whose herds are BSE-free and who argue along the same lines about swine fever, Aujeszky's disease and foot and mouth, would welcome the first thaw coming from Northern Ireland.

Rev. Ian Paisley: That is very heartening for the people of Northern Ireland. At times, we feel isolated—perhaps even discriminated against—because we happen to be better than some of the farmers over here. We want the ban lifted for the whole United Kingdom. Unlike the hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks), I am not a vegetarian. I eat beef and like it. Beef eaters should eat Ulster beef, but if they cannot get Ulster beef, they should not forget Scottish or Yorkshire beef.

Let us be frank. The ban will not be lifted overnight. We shall have to go the way that I am suggesting. I plead with the Government to sit down and look carefully at the matter and say, "Yes, we shall have to do it this way." That is the only way to make progress. As I have already said, we shall not wake up one morning and discover that the ban has suddenly been lifted.

I was at the European Parliament yesterday and I saw a report that said:

"Meanwhile confusing messages emerged from Luxembourg on October 28 on the UK's strategy for eradicating BSE and ending the beef ban. UK Agriculture Minister Douglas Hogg told the press corps he was not pressing for a regional approach to lifting the ban, but would be trying to make progress towards resumption of beef exports 'from certified herds' which were guaranteed free of the taint of BSE, and of the contaminated bone meal held responsible for spreading the disease. However, the presence of Scottish Secretary Michael Forsyth in the UK delegation sent out a different signal."

I am glad that the Secretary of State for Scotland is present. The report continued:

"Both Scotland and the UK province of Northern Ireland have a large number of such herds.

Earlier, the Farm Council President-in-Office Ivan Yates told the press corps that a regional proposal 'could be considered', provided the agreed targeted cull of cattle most at risk from BSE were implemented in that region. 'A special case can be made for Northern Ireland because of their animal identification system and that they were surrounded by water', said the Irish Agriculture Minister. However, Mr. Hogg rejected the idea of destroying cattle from herds already certified free of mad cow disease as 'irrelevant'."

If the Minister is saying, "Yes, I want to make progress towards the resumption of beef exports from certified herds," why does he not put in the working documents? That is the question and that is the position. Let us get the documents in and then see the response from Europe.

7.20 pm

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South–West): From 1985 to 1996, we have been debating BSE in the House, yet we still have a BSE crisis. I believe that as long as it is handled by the present Administration, the issue will drag on and on. I am, therefore, grateful for the opportunity today to express my disgust at the Government's mishandling of the crisis. Government incompetence created it. They deregulated the rendering industry and allowed the prion organism of BSE to get through into the food chain. Government incompetence has maintained the crisis. How dare anyone say that the Tories do not care about manufacturing. They have manufactured more crises than any of our competitors.

At every stage of the crisis, the Government have failed to build a positive bridge with Europe. They have failed to deliver promises, and they have even failed to be consistent with their own version of events. In June, the Conservatives celebrated Florence; in September, they mourned Florence; since 28 October, they have been in confusion. The Tory BSE crisis has created a new verb—to maff it up. The Government have maffed it up, leaving our farmers in chaos and our consumers in fear.

At the European Union summit in Florence in June, in addition to the over-30-month scheme, the UK Government undertook to implement a selective cull of cattle most likely to develop BSE, to remove both meat and bone meal from farms and feed mills, to improve the methods of removing specified bovine material from carcases and to introduce an effective animal identification and movement system. In return, on being satisfied of an effective application of those methods, the European Commission envisaged a staged lifting of the ban on beef and beef products. The necessary draft orders were published to fulfil the commitment to the accelerated cull and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food described it as a great success. But it now appears that there never was a certain timetable for lifting the ban, so why on earth was the agreement signed?

In the following months, we heard contradiction after contradiction. Like Britain's European partners, UK farmers are confused. I have met many farmers in my constituency and they, like farmers elsewhere, are rightly angry and in confusion. It is ridiculous to leave a whole industry trying to interpret the smoke signals coming from MAFF. I fear that the smoke signals are no longer hidden messages of indecision, but the burning of an ineffective dinosaur being steered by an ineffective Government. My farmers fear another cut in the hill livestock compensatory allowance, which other hon. Members have mentioned, when an increase is surely justified.

As a Member of Parliament for a rural constituency, and as a microbiologist by profession, I understand that the science surrounding BSE is continually evolving, but everyone can see only too clearly that a policy of sitting on one's hands waiting for Father Time to sort out the problem is not an acceptable option for British agriculture.

The beef export ban is still 100 per cent. in place and beef farmers have been given no indication of what the Government's policy is and when they can expect progress. The Government have lost their credibility in Britain, and Britain and its farmers eagerly await a change of Government. The Government have also lost their credibility in Europe, with their schoolyard antics losing the respect of even our most long-standing European allies. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said recently of this Government:

"They seize on an issue, they talk tough, they alienate everybody and then they cave in."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. 152.]

Perhaps my right hon. Friend should have said that the Government sleaze on an issue rather than seize on it.

Such a stance undermines the efforts of representatives of farming bodies to press the Commission and member state Governments to honour their part of the Florence agreement. As we cannot rely on this incompetent Government to achieve anything in Europe, their undermining of our representative farming bodies is particularly serious and potentially catastrophic for farming.

I bring to the attention of the House—I am sure that it has been done before—the fact that, at the October meeting of the National Farmers Union, there was a

"vote of no confidence in the Minister's representation of the interests of the UK and its agricultural industry in the European Union."

Indeed, the Minister's speech to the Tory party conference in Bournemouth was described by *Farmers' Weekly* as a "masterpiece of under-achievement". It is now a standing joke among farmers in my constituency that the only safe meat is Hogg-meat as it is spineless, brainless and gutless and, therefore, contains no specified bovine offal. That is possibly a bit unkind, but to be fair to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's miserable ministerial performance, it is merely typical of the Government's overall performance.

It is no surprise that the *Farming News* editorial stated on 11 October, with regard to the impending general election:

"Few in farming will not be wishing that it brings a change in the management."

I return to the subject of science. It is worth bringing to the attention of the House a quotation from a recent edition of the scientific journal *Nature*. On 7 November,

[Mr. Martyn Jones]

Gerald C. Coles, from the department of clinical veterinary science at the university of Bristol, said:

"MAFF has a history of suppressing scientific information it does not like, either by banning publication by its research staff or suggesting to those outside that the publication of certain MAFF sponsored research might jeopardise further funding."

The article then comments on the cultural problem within MAFF. It explains that it arises from

"the view that the role of scientific civil servants is to support politicians. As a result, science must be made to fit policy (which may be dogma) rather than policy being based on scientific research."

That is one of many such comments. The Government have dismissed science they do not agree with, or science that is outside MAFF control, but they have desperately clutched at any science that backs their stance.

I take no pleasure in saying—for the second time this week—"I told you so." In a speech in the House in May 1990 on BSE, I asked the Government to act on a number of crucial points. I asked them, first, to make Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease notifiable and, secondly, not to use the brains of cattle for any purposes. Thirdly, I asked them to ensure that all cattle brains were destroyed by burning within the head and, fourthly, to stop offals such as brains, spleen and lymph glands being used in any animal feed. Here I specifically warned of my concern for Britain's 7 million cats.

On 24 April 1990, even though we had had recently reported cases of feline spongiform encephalopathy, the Minister said that there was no evidence of naturally occurring encephalopathies in cats. That is almost certainly true, yet every year since 1989 we have had cases of FSE. Already this year, six cases have been confirmed and, at the last count, since 1989, there have been 74 sequels to Mad Max, the first cat who went down with the disease—so we have reached Mad Max 75 and counting.

I asked the Government to ensure that if pet food manufacturers must use meat and bone meal, it should be produced only in plant that has never been used for specified bovine offal or for cattle destroyed under the over-30-month scheme. Further to my sadly necessary "I told you so" lecture, I asked the Government not to hide behind expert advice—that is, selected advice. Advisers advise, but Ministers must decide.

I shall now quote from *Nature* of 19 September, which said:

"The role of science, with its attendant uncertainties, is to illuminate political choices not to enforce them. By acting as if it is oblivious to this truth, and to European political reality, the UK Government can only erode its credibility even further."

In 1990, I also asked the Government to stop feeding offal to animals, to instigate random testing at abattoirs—something they have not done yet—to prevent the possibility of vertical transmission in cattle by culling calves and affected cattle, with full compensation, and to increase research on transmission. For some of those suggestions, the Government have had to scurry about like political rats on a sinking ship of consumer confidence, desperately trying to cover up the holes instead of bothering to repair the damage. Other measures have not been taken. Do the Government not care? Are they arrogant? Apparently, the answer is yes on both counts.

Farmers in my constituency and throughout north Wales are suffering because of the Government's arrogance and incompetence and they have had enough. They are suffering great hardship and I am as angry as they are that we have had to put up with the Government's pathetic performance.

Welsh farmers are considered to be the finest in the land and second to none when it comes to caring for their animals. Their suffering is a tragedy that I shall never let the Government forget. No doubt the history books will concur with that analysis.

The Government have continually maffed it up and they should resign. We should have an election as soon as possible so that farmers—Welsh and others—and consumers can vote out this miserable and incompetent Government. Enough is enough.

7.29 pm

Mr. Paul Marland (West Gloucestershire): I am sick and tired of listening to Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen in the House and on the radio knocking the Government and denigrating Britain and British industry. However, we have heard not a word about what the Labour party would do about the present crisis. Today's debate has been distinguished by a lack of speeches from Labour Back-Benchers. Of course, we heard from the House's favourite vegetarian, the hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks), who made a passionate speech, but we have heard very few speeches from the Opposition Back Benches. The fact that very few of them are present demonstrates their lack of interest in the debate and its subject.

We heard earlier that the Labour party backed the cessation of trade in United Kingdom beef. That is another example of the Labour party cosying up to the European Union and being willing to accept whatever it proposes, regardless of the effect or the consequences in Britain.

The right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) made no reference whatever to United Kingdom farmers. My impression was that the debate was being used as a political platform for totally separate purposes. I could not help wondering why the debate was opened by the Opposition spokesman on foreign affairs rather than their spokesman on agriculture. It was only when the answer was dragged out of him that the right hon. Member for Livingston agreed that British beef was safe. He did not volunteer that information. It seems to be the stock-in-trade of the Opposition to spread despondency and speak with the benefit of hindsight, claiming that as a genius that only they possess.

We are talking about the biggest crisis that has ever hit both our farming industry and our food industry. In and around Gloucester and Gloucestershire, the operation of the over-30-month slaughter scheme appears to be going quite well, and the backlog is being reduced. Locally, there is light at the end of the tunnel.

In the past two weeks, nearly all the cattle on the OTMS scheme in Gloucester have been slaughtered. I am assured that the backlog will have been entirely cleared within the next two weeks. Each week, 600 cattle pass through Gloucester market. Some weeks ago, the number was 250. Abattoirs in the district are now looking for cattle to slaughter.

Looking back, one can see that it has not been easy, as many interests have had to be taken into account. We had to do what we could to save the entire industry. Farmers

had to be considered, markets had to be kept going and the interests of abattoirs, cattle dealers, transport companies, butchers and meat wholesalers all had to be safeguarded. It was the biggest crisis ever to hit the food industry in Britain. It was also important to try to keep our European partners on side as we attempted to tackle the problem.

As others have said, this is an evolving crisis and a new disease. There was uncertainty about the best way to tackle it, and we had to find the way forward with some caution. Quite rightly, we followed the best scientific advice available. The Government deserve some recognition for sticking to that course while others bobbed and weaved and changed their minds. I was shocked by the performance of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) when the crisis first came to light, and the way in which she seized upon the opportunity once again to damage British interests.

Although I am speaking locally, clearing the backlog has had an effect on the registration scheme in Gloucestershire. Cattle were due to be registered on the scheme by 1 November so that action could be taken by 4 November. That deadline slipped to 11 November due to the small numbers of cattle that had been registered. That was not due to a lack of information that should have been handed out to farmers, a shortage of forms or other minor difficulties that we have heard about in the past; it was actually due to the lack of cattle that farmers wished to enter on the registration list.

I cannot help wondering whether we need that registration scheme. Could we leave it to the market? I believe that the numbers in the registration scheme have been distorted by the fact that a number of farmers have registered their entire herds. As they were unsure whether any of their cattle would have to be taken out in the not too distant future, in order to safeguard their own position they have registered their entire herds.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister said that some 285,000 cattle were still awaiting slaughter. I wonder how many were as a result of farmers having registered their entire herds under the scheme. May I suggest that, in the changed circumstances, perhaps it would be better to drop the registration scheme and let market forces sort it out? That would change the position, so that the abattoirs were chasing the farmers for cattle rather than the farmers chasing the abattoirs to allow their cattle into the scheme to be slaughtered.

I believe that we should reconsider the selective cull. There has been a considerable change of heart in the House and throughout the country on whether it will remain necessary in future. Originally, we heard that hundreds of thousands of cattle would have to be taken out under the selective scheme, but now, as a result of successfully clearing the backlog of the OTMS scheme, the number has been substantially reduced.

Many farmers have made their own arrangements under the 30-month scheme in order to take older cattle out of their herds. That may have been part of the reason why there was a considerable logjam during the operation of the scheme. Yesterday, we heard again that there is further scientific evidence that older cattle are most at risk. If the 30-month scheme remains in operation, they will all be taken out of the food chain.

Sir David Naish confirmed to the Back-Bench agriculture committee that farmers would like the selective cull to continue, but only if our European partners agreed to lift the ban when the selective ban had been completed. I have serious doubts whether our European partners would lift the ban if we went ahead with the selective cull. It is important to get their agreement. As has been said, we have already fulfilled four of the five preconditions set out by the Florence summit. It is a great shame that our European partners have not recognised our efforts.

I agree with what has been said about lifting the ban in Northern Ireland. That would be an excellent first step. We could then flush out exactly what our European partners had in mind and whether they would lift the ban if we proceeded with the selective cull. Lifting the ban on Northern Ireland might give us more confidence that we should proceed without delay.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): If that is the case for Northern Ireland, does my hon. Friend agree that there is also a good argument for considering the Scottish situation?

Mr. Marland: I like the idea of going a step at a time; that is a helpful intervention. We should seek to get the ban in Northern Ireland lifted, test our European partners, and then start concentrating on what has been happening in Scotland. The Scottish farmers are making a good case, as my hon. Friend says.

On the subject of compensation for farmers, I realise that I am walking on eggshells. Nevertheless, farmers in Gloucestershire have told me that they are grateful for the amount of taxpayers' money that has been paid to them by the Government.

I am reliably informed that the value of cull dairy cows this year throughout the scheme has been similar to the value of cull dairy cows during last year. That fact is worth recording. Some farmers may have specific views on their circumstances; it is easy to blow up an individual case to demonstrate the awfulness of a situation, but overall, the information I have is that cull dairy cows have retained their value well during the scheme.

I know that the drop in the price of cull cows was unpopular. Whoever was responsible for the drop, it happened. Part of the reason for the drop may have been that farmers were achieving a higher return for 30-month-old cows than if they had put them into market. Taxpayers can be asked to pay so much, but I do not think that anyone wanted the farmers to profit from the scheme in the way that some have, and there is considerable evidence that that happened.

Sir Jim Spicer: I can see the logic in what my hon. Friend has just said, but I cannot see the fairness. Some people stood by from early May with their cattle waiting to go, watched others go through the back door, and then found that the cut had happened and the ones who came in through the back door had collected the cash. Those who waited are naturally irritated about that.

Mr. Marland: That is why I said earlier that I recognised that I was walking on eggshells. I have not heard anyone dissent from my observation that some farmers sought to retain their animals to put them into the 30-month scheme, so that they could achieve a higher price. That is a sad reflection on them, but it is the way things work. There are so many farmers and so many cattle that the Government would not have been able to regulate the scheme in any other way.

[Mr. Marland]

One or two other speakers have mentioned the Intervention Board, and some problems surrounding its activity have been brought to my attention. For example, it has been difficult to trace large payments made by the Intervention Board to markets to be distributed among a number of farmers. The markets have had difficulty in tracing what the payments were for in order to apportion the money as intended. The markets have had to go back to the Intervention Board to find out how the cheques were made up. The Intervention Board has done its best to co-operate, and that is the one minor irritation that I have heard about.

Furthermore, I understand that the Intervention Board has been uncompromising in its attitude to missing ear tags. Even when a cow in the system is clearly freeze-branded and the farm records back up its history, I understand that the board has been difficult about accepting that the cow is eligible for the scheme. I understand everybody's concern about fraud, but perhaps in the circumstances a little more understanding from the board might not go amiss.

All in all, in my district, there is some light at the end of the tunnel of the gruesome situation. I wish to pay tribute, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) did, to farmers for the way in which they have responded throughout this time. It has been difficult for some of them, but they recognise the difficulties we face. I also pay tribute to the president of the National Farmers Union, who has shown tremendous leadership during this difficult time. He has not become flustered but has remained cool-headed. Despite the pressure that he has been under to lambast the Government, he has been fair and reasonable throughout. I publicly pay tribute to him.

It is wrong to blow up isolated cases, but it is easy to do, and it is an old trick still used by some Opposition Members to paint a picture of a difficult situation. It is wrong to focus too much attention on one individual. I also pay tribute to the Meat and Livestock Commission, which has mounted a quiet and steady campaign to promote British beef. It kept saying that British beef was safe, as everybody in the House—certainly all Conservative Members—thinks it is. A butcher in my constituency—Andy Crease, who has a butcher's shop in Newent—has kept all his customers eating beef by reassuring them that everything in his shop was of the highest standard. I salute him for what he has done to keep up beef sales in Newent.

I hope that those who run the mighty McDonald's will take notice of our debate today. They have explained their difficulties with their customers and the use of British beef in McDonald's restaurants. I hope that they will be reassured by what has been said in the House and the way in which beef sales are keeping up. Before too long, I hope that McDonald's will decide to go back to using British beef, because its consumption in its restaurants has a tremendous effect on the price.

Mr. Tyler: You will know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that, in your city, the royal naval dockyard and the Ministry of Defence have let a franchise to McDonald's, which is the first ever on naval property. That McDonald's emporium is now serving Dutch beef to British service people and the dockyard workers. Does the hon. Member agree that it is time the Government used their influence to ensure that our service men have access to clean, good, fresh British beef? Does he also agree that, if the task force were to set sail now to the Falklands, it would have to eat Argentine or Dutch beef, as was mentioned earlier?

Mr. Marland: The last part of the hon. Gentleman's question is imaginative. I do not think that it is the role of the Government to interfere in the private sector and tell McDonald's restaurants that they must use British beef.

Mr. Tyler: Why not?

Mr. Marland: Because we are not in the business of compulsion. We have to seek to persuade McDonald's by other means that British beef is safe and that its customers can be reassured about eating British beef, probably more so than about Dutch beef because, as I said earlier, I believe that BSE exists just as badly in Europe as it does here. It has been tremendously under-reported in Europe, and that is a great shame.

I lament the way in which senior Opposition spokesmen have sought to denigrate British industry and British farmers, and to make trouble where no trouble exists.

7.48 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): I found the opening speech by the Minister of Agriculture profoundly depressing. I am sure that farmers across the country will have got little cheer from the Government's grasp of the problem and, in particular, their lack of success in lifting the European ban.

When the Prime Minister returned from Florence, he hailed his framework agreement as the way forward. He said that, by October or November, the ban would be lifted, but our part of that deal was the second slaughter programme, which collapsed during August and September. It was clear from the Minister's speech that there was mistrust—mutual mistrust, so he alleges—between our European partners and Britain. The Government did not have faith that, if we went ahead with our slaughter programme, the EU would lift the ban. That intense mistrust is appalling. It is a reflection of the Government's relations with the European Union. It is sad, and it makes it difficult to work our way out of the crisis.

I am afraid that remarks such as the latter remarks of the hon. Member for West Gloucestershire (Mr. Marland), in which he expressed Euro-scepticism and sought to blame Europe for a crisis that is absolutely British-made, are extremely unhelpful in finding a way out of the problem.

The accelerated slaughter programme is our side of the bargain. One does not sell one's house for £50,000 and then go back and ask for more. Once one has signed the contract or agreed to the communiqué, one has to keep one's part of the deal, whether it was good, brilliant or poor. I was taught when I was a youngster that an Englishman's word was his bond. I am from Wales, and when I give my word, I stick to it. It is a bad breach of

faith on the part of the Government that they have been backsliding throughout the summer since the Florence agreement.

Very little pressure has been placed on the Government by Conservative Members this evening to proceed with the accelerated slaughter programme, which has to be the way forward. We agreed to the framework that was set up. Its targeting is difficult to define. We accept the difficulties, but it is the only agreement we have.

We have heard three excellent speeches from Northern Ireland Members this evening. There was nothing concrete or definite in the Minister's speech about making a special case for Northern Ireland, where the incidence of BSE is so much less than in mainland Britain. Traceability and records are much better. There is no backlog, and the problem is relatively much simpler to solve. The way ahead is to make a special case. Ivan Yates and Commissioner Fischler are key people in the Council of Ministers. We have them on side, and they want to see us proceed in the direction of special treatment for Northern Ireland.

I listened intently to the Minister's speech, but he gave no assurance that the Government would submit the necessary papers, because they would then have to proceed with the accelerated slaughter programme, and they are unwilling to do that. There is a lack of political will to proceed with implementing the Florence agreement, and at the same time Northern Ireland is being held back.

I am afraid that my general impression from this evening's debate is that the Government are being slow and ponderous, and have shown bad faith in finding a way out of the problems that afflict us.

I was in the Chamber on 24 June when the Prime Minister made a statement on the Florence summit. What he said was incredible. He said that most of the stages in lifting the ban would be completed by October or November. The steps we took were up to us. We had to implement in full the over-30-month scheme and proceed with the accelerated slaughter programme. If we fulfilled both those conditions, as well as four other conditions—which have been met—two stages in lifting the ban could be reached in October and two in November. The fifth stage would be to lift the ban from all beef. The barren cows programme would remain.

The Prime Minister said:

"this timetable is essentially in our hands."—[*Official Report*, 24 June 1996; Vol. 280, c. 22.]

If the timetable was in their hands, the Government have proved incompetent in the three or four months since in implementing the programme.

Sir Jim Spicer: On the particular point about implementing the selective cull, the hon. Gentleman has close links with his farmers' unions, as do I and all other hon. Members who have taken part in the debate. Will he recall just where his local NFU stood on the selective cull in May and June? Was it not opposed to it? In the south-west of England, the NFU was saying that, if the Government tried to implement the cull, farmers would block their driveways and not allow it to go ahead.

Mr. Williams: I accept that the Farmers Union of Wales in my constituency has changed its mind backwards and forwards over the summer. I promise the hon. Gentleman that the farmers' unions are now united. I shall quote them later to show that they want to see us proceed rapidly towards a selective cull.

I shall continue to follow the argument chronologically. In his speech on 24 July, the Minister of Agriculture said that the Florence

"agreement was a great success, and provides a solid way forward."—[*Official Report*, 24 July 1996; Vol. 282, c. 369.]

Yet, three months later, we had prevarication and a breach of faith during September. At the beginning of the recess, we expected to receive details of the accelerated slaughter programme. On the last day that the House sat, the Secretary of State explained why there was a delay in drafting the programme.

During the summer, a statement was made on maternal transmission. There has been some confusion on that since, but the crude numbers suggest that it is a factor to be borne in mind in the slaughter programme.

Then we had the Oxford study, which outlined various scenarios and estimated how effective or efficient a slaughter programme would be. Such scenarios need to be taken into account in drafting the programme, but I learned from my discussions with farmers at shows and at local offices of the FUW when the statement on maternal transmission came out that there was an instinctive feeling, which was borne out by the statement, that it was sensible to slaughter the last calf born to a cow which subsequently died of BSE. BSE would clearly be developing within the calf's brain.

It makes sense to slaughter the birth cohort of any herd of which 5 or 10 per cent. have already contracted BSE. The Oxford study considered various such scenarios. It is the Government's role to draw up a suitable, targeted slaughter programme. The figures may be of the order of 100,000. I cannot understand why MAFF and Conservative Members find such a figure difficult to accept. We already have in place a programme that involves the slaughter of more than 1 million cows in a calendar year. We are talking about an additional 100,000. That is not many more—just an additional 10 per cent.—so why do we not proceed with that?

The right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) expressed serious reservations about any second slaughter programme, because he thought that it would be inefficient. I accept that, but it is no more inefficient than the barren cows programme is now. If one out of every 100 cows slaughtered has BSE, that scheme will be 99 per cent. inefficient. The figure for the targeted programme is about 30 cows slaughtered for every one with BSE, making it a more efficient programme.

In research carried out at St. Mary's hospital and Imperial College in London, Professor Collinge identified the fingerprint for a BSE prion and a CJD prion. Initially, farmers and the national press took that to be a depressing find, as it appeared to make it all the more certain that the newly identified strain of CJD was directly related to BSE. The vast majority of scientific opinion is now of that view, and Collinge's work confirmed it.

The research contained the opinion that, within perhaps six months, we will have a test for CJD using samples from the tonsils and lymph nodes of human beings—a significant step forward. It may be disturbing, in that we could then use anonymous testing or volunteers to estimate the seriousness of the incidence of CJD in the

[Mr. Williams]

next five, 10 or 20 years. If the test is available in six months, we may discover within a year or two that there are a few dozen cases of CJD. If so, CJD will be less important than salmonella, and we will wonder what the panic has been about. If the numbers are higher, however, the test will have given us a measure of the problem that lies in store.

If we can test for CJD, it may allow us to produce a test for BSE in live cattle. Throughout last year—and in debates since 1989—the Opposition have pressed vigorously for research to be carried out to produce a test for BSE in cattle, which would lead to the only sensible slaughter programme. If we can develop such a test within six months, we can apply it every three months or six months, and slaughter only those animals showing signs of BSE. That slaughter programme would be 100 per cent. efficient, and that is the direction in which we must move.

We must not be afraid of science, as science can help us solve the problem. Until we have such a test, the Government must proceed with the accelerated slaughter programme and legislate in that area. The farming unions want the programme, and we agreed to it in Florence. We must also press Northern Ireland's case for the restrictions to be lifted, as a first major step towards having the ban lifted for the rest of the UK.

8.3 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I shall speak briefly, as I know that others want to get in. I shall make three points: first, I will say a few brief words about the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg); secondly, I will mention some points put to me by my local Lincolnshire NFU branches; and, thirdly, I will give my views on the selective cull and whether we should proceed with it.

First, my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has, sadly, been traduced as usual during this debate. I very much regret that the NFU has taken it upon itself to demand his resignation. It may be true that my right hon. and learned Friend is not the Errol Flynn of our parliamentary generation in terms of charm or good looks, but no one compares with him in terms of intelligence, integrity and moral courage.

I wish my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food well in his continuing efforts, and nothing can be gained on the part of the NFU by demanding his resignation—particularly as the NFU itself has changed its position on the issue. During the summer, the NFU urged the Government not to proceed with the selective cull, and it has now accused the Government of dithering. I do not blame the NFU for changing its position, as this is a highly complex situation and it is quite entitled to change its mind. But the Government are equally entitled to change their mind on the basis of scientific evidence, as they have done.

Secondly, I wish to refer to the views of my local NFU branches. Like all hon. Members who represent agricultural areas, I am only too well aware that this is one of the gravest crises facing rural areas in many years. I had a number of meetings with my local NFU branches over the summer about the backlog in the 30-month scheme. Ministers—particularly the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), who has taken a close interest in this matter, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—have cleared the backlog. Those are not just my words, because I took it upon myself to check today with the Lincoln NFU and with the regional NFU at Uppingham. I was told that the backlog in our region will be cleared by December, and a great deal of credit should go to Ministers for achieving that.

My local branches say that there are still wide variations in the time it takes for farmers to get their beasts slaughtered, and that the new registration and permit scheme that is to come into effect should even out those problems. They add, however, that it is too early to say how effective the scheme will be. They have made it absolutely clear that, as far as the 30-month scheme is concerned, they believe that we have cured the problem.

My local NFU branches and the national organisation—I now come to my third and final point—now call for a selective cull, but I very much hope that the Government will resist these calls. I believe that they should resist them for two reasons. First, there is very little cogent evidence that such a selective cull would achieve a rapid eradication of the disease; and, secondly, there is little cogent evidence that it would be politically effective in Europe. As an hon. Member who represents a rural area, I want to do all that I can to help farmers resolve this problem. If I felt that a selective cull would be effective physically—in terms of eradicating the disease—or politically, I would be the first to call for it. There is no such evidence.

We have heard during the debate about the various scientific evidence. Professor Anderson wrote during the summer that

"the epidemic is well past its peak, and seems to be in a phase of rapid decline."

He added that new infections from contaminated feed

"are predicted to be close to zero"

by the end of this year. Some interesting statistics have been produced during the debate, but no one has denied that all the various options for the cull would, to a greater or lesser extent, be hugely expensive and barely effective.

The evidence suggests that if all 7 million cattle in this country were culled, 1,300 would have been culled for every case saved. Culling the 2 million cattle born between October 1990 and 1993 would result in 564 being culled for each BSE case saved. Some 455 cattle would have to be culled to save each BSE case if cattle from herds in which a case originated between January 1991 and December 1995 were culled. So it goes on. Virtually every single option—there is no need to detain the House, as they have all been published—would result in a huge number of cattle being culled at great cost with very few BSE cases being saved. Those are the scientific facts, and no one has been able to refute them.

I do not believe that it would be politically effective in Europe to proceed down the route of a unilateral selective cull. One need only consider what happened with gelatine: we were assured that the ban would be lifted but every member nation has found some excuse to maintain it. If we were to go down that route without getting an assurance in writing that there would be a timetable for a phased lifting of the ban, member states would find some excuse for keeping out British cattle. I do not blame them

for that, because they have their own political situation to deal with and it is not for me to comment on public opinion in Europe.

In Florence we achieved not a timetable but agreement to a process. We should have continued the policy of non co-operation until we had a firm timetable; the subsequent history of the affair bears out that view. I am told that on the continent BSE is known as the JCB disease, because so many cattle are simply shovelled into pits and never heard of again.

We should insist in Europe that all contaminated cattle be kept out of the human food chain. The fact, confirmed by people on both sides of the debate, is that we have taken adequate steps in the existing cull, in ensuring that older beasts do not go on the market at all and in removing all potentially affected parts from all beasts. Every objective scientific observer accepts that British beef is safe, as do the Commissioner and the World Health Organisation. There is nothing more that we can do to make British beef safe.

Much as I want to help my local farmers, I must tell them that the Country Landowners Association better represents their interests than the National Farmers Union. The CLA is not calling for an immediate cull but insisting that any cull must be linked to a timetable. If we did not secure that link we would be embarking on a senseless, expensive and cruel slaughter that would achieve extremely little.

We need to stop having debates like this. We all know that this debate is merely the Opposition's attempt to cobble together a majority to embarrass the Government. Do they really think that if the debate achieves any publicity it will help British beef? Will it help the food industry if they manage to defeat the Government? Of course not. I hope and believe that they will not defeat the Government, but are playing politics.

The Government must keep their nerve, stand firm and gradually rebuild confidence in British beef. The British public have confidence in our beef. There is no possible rationale for the European ban. We must resist the siren calls, and I congratulate the Government on the stance that they have taken hitherto.

8.12 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Like the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), I am a member of the Agriculture Select Committee. Probably not for the first or the last time, I disagree profoundly with his analysis, particularly on the accelerated cull.

The right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) made a forceful point when he told us that the position on the accelerated cull had changed significantly since June. We are now well into the backlog and if all the indications are right we shall have cleared it by the end of the year; we shall then have the opportunity to implement the accelerated cull.

Until the speech of the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, there was general cross-party realisation that there has to be movement on the accelerated cull. It would not be a unilateral action, because it was part of the agreement that the Prime Minister acknowledged was made at Florence. The accelerated cull was not imposed by the European Union or the Commission; it was proposed by the Government as a way of trying to lift the ban. We know that the ban will not be lifted unless that condition is adhered to. We should proceed on the basis that the accelerated cull must be linked to the lifting of the ban in clearer terms than were set out at Florence.

I am pleased that the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) is here. Tonight we have heard about the impact of the BSE crisis on all the countries of the United Kingdom—Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales—and for most of the debate representatives from the Offices for those countries have been present: the Secretary of State for Scotland, Scottish Office Ministers, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and a Minister from Northern Ireland have all been here, but there has not been a single Minister from the Welsh Office. That is an utter disgrace. I acknowledge the fact that the right hon. Gentleman told us his view from the Government Benches, but a Minister from Wales should have been present, because BSE has had a profound impact on the rural economy of Wales.

The matter is important to Wales, because 80 per cent. of its land mass is in less-favoured areas. Agriculture maintains not only the fabric of our rural economy but the social fabric of many parts of Wales; it is vital, because many people's jobs depend on it. A recent study published by the institute of rural studies at the University college of Wales at Aberystwyth showed the extent of the damage caused to the industry: between 2,500 and 3,500 jobs are at risk as a result of the crisis and our rural economy could lose between £40 million and £50 million. It is therefore important to bring the perspective of farmers in Wales to the attention of the House.

Let us consider some of the core issues. The Agriculture Select Committee examined the matter thoroughly and it became clear that the BSE epidemic arose from the relaxation of the rules on animal meat processing in 1981. The disease was first diagnosed in 1986 and made notifiable in 1988, but it was not until this year that firm steps were taken to eradicate it.

The Government initially appeared overwhelmed by the loss of confidence in the beef industry following the announcement made by the Secretary of State for Health in March this year. They had a number of options: first, the Minister told the House that all cattle over 30 months would be deboned; then there was the suggestion of a wholesale slaughter policy, from which the Government eventually withdrew; and, finally, there was the over-30-month scheme, which has been implemented.

In Wales, the scheme got off to an extremely slow start. We do not have adequate rendering facilities and we had the problem of the designation of abattoirs and collection centres. The Government have increased the number of animals that they want to include in the slaughter scheme—up to 55,000 a week—and we have great difficulty in meeting our targets in Wales, for the lack of rendering capacity.

One of the main reasons for the Government's failure to have the ban on beef exports lifted was the chaos caused by the original introduction of the over-30-month scheme and their failure to recognise the scale of the problem. Farmers' organisations and unions in my constituency and elsewhere consistently told me that the Government had underestimated the backlog. The Government thought that it was about 100,000 and the farmers, about 400,000. Eventually, a proper survey

[Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones]

showed the backlog to be substantially more. Newsletters produced by the Ministry constantly told us that the backlog would be cleared by October. That was repeated until last month when we were told what the farmers had known all along—that the backlog was substantially greater than the Government had acknowledged.

That was an issue in Europe. We accept that the ban was completely unjustified and we want to see it lifted. But the European member states were not properly informed of the extent of the backlog and now the Government are equivocating on the accelerated cull.

Ministers from different Departments have said different things to different people in different places at different times. The Minister of Agriculture has said one thing, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland another, the Secretary of State for Scotland another and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster another. What is the Government's position on the accelerated cull? Northern Ireland Members have asked today about the position in Northern Ireland, yet we still do not know. Unless the Government make their position clear, the day for lifting the ban will remain on the back burner. The Government need a clear timetable for its introduction.

I want to clarify one point which seems to have been missed by the Government when it was put to them. Why was there a 10 per cent. reduction in the compensation under the over-30-month scheme from 1 ecu to 0.9 ecu? That was put forward by the Government. It was agreed in Brussels, but it was a Government proposal, made when farmers knew the extent of the backlog and had been waiting patiently for their animals to go through the queue. As we have heard tonight, others were taken in through the back door, getting their compensation at the old rate. Those farmers who waited patiently, playing by the rules, found their compensation cut overnight without any consultation. That is no way in which to treat an industry in crisis. The Government should listen to the voices on both sides of the House and restore the position to what it was previously in order to ensure that those farmers who are still waiting are compensated at the right level.

We acknowledge that additional help has been given to the industry. The Minister today talked about the £29 million which has been given to farmers in respect of animals sold between March and June, the £29 million announced in October, the £50 million additional money from the EU following the Luxembourg Council, and the £60 million which has been allocated through the HLCA. All that money is being put in through existing mechanisms, but the difficulty is that not every farmer qualifies for each of those mechanisms. The Government should ensure that there is equity of treatment for each farmer who has suffered loss as a result of the beef crisis.

It is to be welcomed that the HLCA payments will go to those in the hills who are in desperate need of assistance, but lowland farmers also have great problems. Conditions are attached to the beef special premium and the suckler cow premium so that not every farmer will receive the same amount in compensation. The great advantage of the over-30-month compensation is that each farmer had the same compensation. They knew what they would get. Using those mechanisms can distort that compensation and the Government must address that.

We accept that the Government have already introduced many of the points agreed at Florence—all the points that the Minister has acknowledged and all the points made by hon. Members. But the accelerated cull remains the key issue, and unless the Government are prepared to bring forward proposals, it is highly unlikely that there will be significant early movement on the lifting of the ban.

We are talking not about hundreds of thousands of animals here but about a limited number. The Government should go back to our European partners and talk sensibly, on the basis of the scientific evidence, about how the ban can be lifted. There must be a firm timetable for lifting the ban for all beef animals aged under 30 months. The overwhelming view expressed on both sides of the House tonight is that that accelerated cull will now form the basis of the lifting of that ban and I ask the Government to act with urgency on that issue.

8.25 pm

Sir Jim Spicer (West Dorset): It would be easy simply to say that I agree wholeheartedly with the views of my right hon. Friends the Members for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) and for Bridgwater (Mr. King), which the House has already heard. I could then sit down, but that is no way for a politician to behave. Given the opportunity to sound off and to reiterate exactly what they have said, that I must surely do. I am delighted that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister is in his place as I shall be repeating almost word for word what my right hon. Friends said in the debate.

I want to concentrate on two points and I illustrate my first point by telling the House about a farmer in my constituency, John Hoskin, the chairman of my local branch of the National Farmers Union, who is well known to the Parliamentary Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), whom I am delighted to see on the Front Bench this evening. What has happened to John Hoskin has also happened to others in my constituency and particularly in the south-west where BSE has hit harder than anywhere else in the country during the past five years.

As hon. Members know, the 163,000 cases of BSE—a chilling figure—have not occurred in the past six months but in the past five years. Long before that dreadful day in March, farmers in our constituencies were living with the fear of BSE and, to be honest, keeping it to themselves. They reported and disposed of each case, but they did not tell me as a friend and someone who has known them for many years.

I shall always remember the shock that I had when I went to my first meeting with the NFU after the statement on 21 March, when suddenly people around the table told me that they had had 30, 40, 50 or 60 cases of BSE in their herds. I realised then for the first time what they had lived through. But that is as nothing compared with what they have had to endure in the past six months, when they have faced uncertainty about the future and how to go forward.

I come back to John Hoskin. John Hoskin is a tenant of the Duchy of Cornwall on a large farm just outside Dorchester. In January this year he was elected chairman of the Dorset NFU. It is pretty certain that his wife wishes that he had never been elected chairman in this particular year, and he probably feels the same way himself.

On 1 May, when the first measures were announced, John Hoskin had 102 cattle waiting to be disposed of. We all know what the problems have been since May. It is no use the Opposition trying to make capital out of this, because there have been massive problems. The rendering capacity was not there. How can a slaughter rate suddenly be accelerated overnight from 10,000 or 15,000 per week up to 55,000 or 60,000? It cannot be done. The problems arose and, of course, we fell behind. As a result, on 1 October, not one cow had left John Hoskin's farm. The same was true for many other farmers in the south-west, which was the area with the highest incidence of BSE and where far more cattle were left hanging around. John Hoskin still had 102 cattle and winter slowly but surely began to set in.

On 8 October, an angry John Hoskin came to Bournemouth to the Conservative party conference. He and I had been in almost daily contact before that. He went with other members of the farming community to see my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who expressed to John not only his concern and sympathy, but his absolute determination and the Government's determination to do everything that was needed—not just for one year, but for the next five years if necessary—to ensure that the agricultural community came through the gravest crisis that we have ever faced. Some hon. Members may say that they would have expected the Prime Minister to say that.

John Hoskin was reassured by that meeting, but with 102 cattle waiting at home at that time he also knew that on 21 October there would be a cut of 10 per cent. in the price that he would receive. That point has already been made by many Conservative and Opposition Members during the debate. Frankly, I do not care where that cut came from or how it was initiated. It may have been the most logical measure in the world and there are perhaps good reasons why it should have come about. It was logical, but I have to say to my right hon. and learned Friend that it was not fair.

John Hoskin had been waiting in the queue since May and not one cow had departed from his farm, but in the week beginning 21 October—believe it or not—35 went, and a further 25 went the following week. I phoned him this morning and was told that he had only 15 cattle left to go. He said to me, "Of course I am a happier man because they have gone, but it still rankles with me that some of the people who were up to their tricks behind the scenes and who were getting cattle away got the higher level of compensation while I did not." That point has been made time and again in the Chamber today.

Why did that happen? Why did John Hoskin not get a fair crack of the whip? We all know that we did not get the register established in time. The NFU wanted a register and I do not know why we did not do it. Now we have the register, and it should be possible to say that the register is the end and that the 10 per cent. cut should be implemented only when it is through. However it is done, I beg my right hon. and learned Friend to reconsider the proposal on the grounds of fairness alone.

By mid-December all cattle on the register will have been cleared. That is a massive achievement. I offer my warmest congratulations to all the Ministers who have been involved, to all the abattoirs and to most of the renderers, although the latter really do not need much thanks as they have done rather well out of the operation. During the past two or three months, the situation has been treated as a crisis and everyone has worked to get the figure above 55,000, and we hope that it will stay there. Everyone involved deserves our thanks.

After that, we have to look to the future. Everyone wants the ban lifted. To trace the history of the crisis, we have to go back further than Florence, to the meeting in Turin a week after 21 March, when most of the Community's political leaders said to our Prime Minister, "This whole thing is nonsense—we'll get it sorted out." I remember hearing the Italian Prime Minister saying, "Absolutely ridiculous—it will not stand." Yet they went back, talked the matter over and instructed their representatives on the scientific committee to vote to keep the ban in place. That is the challenge that we face.

If we are now to consider a selective cull, let us be absolutely clear that there are steps towards achieving that. First and foremost, we have to establish how many cattle are left on the list. My guess is—all that we have heard tonight from Members from Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and England confirms it—that the number will be far less than we originally thought, because many of those cattle will already have been swept up in the 30-month cull. As the president of the NFU said the other day, what farmer wants to be left with the cow that has the last case of BSE in the United Kingdom? Everyone will have been doing their own selective cull and many of the cattle will have disappeared.

Let us say that we are dealing with, at the upper end, 100,000 cattle. That is two weeks' slaughter. The prize, if we can win it, is worth while, but we have to ask ourselves whether we shall achieve that prize by going that far down the road. I echo what most hon. Members have said—by all means, let us get everything in shape, let us be ready with the lists of where those cattle are, but let us then go to the European Community—whether to the scientific committee, or to that kind and sympathetic Commissioner, or to the Irish representative who is so helpful and thoughtful—and say, "This is what we will do, but we will not do it unless the ban is going to be lifted." Somebody said that we should have that in writing: I want it written in blood—I want to be absolutely certain that the promise will not be reneged on. That is what we have to achieve.

If we can achieve that, and if the Community lives up to its promise, it must then go a step further. Simply lifting the ban will help us in South Africa and it may help us to export our calves to Italy, where they are wanted, or to the Netherlands. Northern Ireland's farmers already have their markets lined up—they tend to be far thinking in matters of this kind. In addition, however, we have to ensure that there is no impediment to our exporting to Europe.

I remember the lamb war. My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister was in Normandy—I came along a little later. When I marched off a lorry containing sheep that had entered a French port, it was almost like landing on D-day. The port was deserted and we were cowering and cringing like the lead man in a fighting patrol, waiting for the French farmers to attack us, and I can promise that there were no police about. If we are to return to that sort of scenario, where every consignment of British beef is attacked in that way, we may as well forget it.

Nevertheless, it is worth going that extra mile to try to get the ban lifted because the alternative is five years as a fortress. Like my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister,

[Sir Jim Spicer]

I would give a pledge that even if we have to endure five years as a fortress we shall give our full support to the farming community, and I hope that the Opposition parties would say the same. We are determined that agriculture should emerge from this total ban in good shape and ready to fight.

Let us face up to reality. Let us take the Community's words at their true value, and let the Community show us that its representatives are honest and basing everything on scientific evidence. Only then should we go down that road, or at least make sure that we can explore it.

8.39 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): The hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir J. Spicer) is seeking practical solutions and I certainly urge him down that road, whether they are written in blood or not.

The Scottish National party amendment offers some practical, common-sense solutions towards getting a breakthrough in the European ban for Scotland and Northern Ireland. We could use the strength of our industries to breach the ban and lead the United Kingdom industry out of the present unacceptable situation.

I have found this debate and the Minister's contribution somewhat depressing. According to the Minister, there is no end in sight for this continuing crisis. After eight months, there is still no sign of an end to the industry's problems. The debate has been a little like the film, "Groundhog Day". Each time this Hogg reappears at the Dispatch Box, we get slight variations, but nothing really changes. There has been no progress towards ending the greatest crisis to hit the agriculture industry in modern times. I should like to see a greater sense of urgency. This crisis is attacking the heart of one of our most important industries.

From his performance today, the Minister seems to have no real plans and, apparently, no commitment to solving the BSE problem. He complains that there is no European timetable for lifting the beef ban; yet he admits that he has not even got to first base and submitted detailed working documents to Europe. He has deliberately ignored the strongest European cards—the industries in Scotland and Northern Ireland. They could get zonal exemptions and jointly breach the European ban. They could lead the United Kingdom's industry out of its problems.

Those are the major keys, but I have not heard anything from the Minister to suggest that he is prepared to use those keys to unlock the door to Europe. After eight or more months, we still have no timetable. We have had only a series of Government failures affecting 6,000 jobs in Scotland and an industry that is worth £120 million annually. We are now well into the eighth month of what has been an agonising time for our beef industry. The Government's involvement has been a catalogue of disasters and wilful neglect. Rather than the Government making a serious attempt to eradicate BSE as soon as possible and lift the EU export ban, we have witnessed only a series of absurd U-turns, the only logic of which has been to pander to the Euro-sceptic gallery.

Despite all that, the Prime Minister returned from Florence in June with an agreed package which set a deadline of October for returning prime Scottish beef to European markets. That deadline has now passed and the Government have failed to implement the accelerated selective slaughter—an essential part of the agreement. The signals from the Ministry of Agriculture suggest that the selective cull may now be shelved, along with all attempts to lift the export ban, the pretence being that the so-called review is based on the evidence of one scientific report. In fact, all the evidence suggests that it is another unhelpful twist by a Government who have been shown as willing to sacrifice an entire industry for short-term political gain in middle England.

The Government have been far from objective in heeding scientific wisdom. As far back as March, the first month of the crisis, Professor T. H. Pennington, professor of bacteriology at Aberdeen university, gave an independent opinion which confirmed that the level of risk from Scottish beef from accredited herds was

"as close to zero as practically possible."

Professor Pennington said:

"Scottish Quality Beef can be traced back to BSE-free herds. From the scientific point of view it would be irrational to rate the health risk from consuming this beef as higher than that run from any other country that had reported BSE in its own cattle—a risk that is currently considered to be negligible."

BSE is essentially a dairy problem and its incidence in Scotland and Northern Ireland is significantly lower than in the rest of the United Kingdom. We have heard the figures from Northern Ireland, and I must point out to the Minister that Scottish herds have produced less than 5 per cent. of United Kingdom BSE cases since the mid-1980s and that the numbers are falling rapidly. The over-30-months slaughter scheme has been operating well in Scotland. We have not shared the difficulties experienced in England, many of which have been rehearsed today.

A selective cull in Scotland would mean slaughtering only about 3,500 animals and could be completed in a matter of weeks if the Government chose to do so. The beef industry in Scotland has insisted that the selective cull must go ahead. It recognises that living with the beef ban is not an option. Before the crisis, 20 per cent. of Scottish prime beef output—worth some £120 million each year—went to the export market. There is no realistic prospect of re-routing that amount of top quality beef to other parts of the United Kingdom. Like the Irish, in many ways we have no alternative but to break the ban and restore our export markets.

The overall value of the beef industry to the Scottish economy is £1.2 billion. Agriculture accounts for more than 3 per cent. of Scotland's gross domestic product—more than twice the proportion in England. That is why we are asking for a greater sense of urgency from the Minister. He chooses to indulge in conversations during the debate and listens to nobody. He should do some talking to Europe and listen to the House of Commons, but perhaps that is asking too much of a Minister who is busy talking to his colleagues. I have news for him: he will eventually have to talk to the electorate, and that will break any complacency that he shows in the House.

The nature of the industry in Scotland is different, and I regret that the Secretary of State for Scotland is not present to hear this. A total of 70 per cent. of Scottish beef originates from suckler cow herds which are kept to produce only beef animals. There is more than enough difference to merit a different approach in the marketing

of Scottish beef. Since the start of the crisis, the Scottish National party has been campaigning strongly for a regional or zonal approach to ensure that the ban is lifted from Scottish and Northern Ireland quality beef as soon as possible. That approach has received the support of a number of EU countries, including Germany, Spain, the Netherlands and Ireland. There would be support in Europe if the Scottish and Northern Ireland card is played, and it is time that the Government did that.

The Commission President, Jacques Santer, and the farm commissioner, Commissioner Fischler, were also receptive to the proposal, but insisted that it had to come from the United Kingdom Government. That is where the real problem has been. It is up to the Government to make the proposal. It is no use the Minister standing at the Dispatch Box and whining that there is no timetable in Europe: he should produce the working documents and proposals to get beef from Scotland and Northern Ireland on to the European markets and make that essential breach in the ban. Instead, the Government have repeatedly put their Unionist dogma and their Europhobic prejudices ahead of securing any progress for Scotland. The Scottish beef industry has been forced to bear the burden of that approach.

Where was the Secretary of State for Scotland during all this time? He could be described as Scotland's resident Europhobe. He has not been fulfilling his obligation to represent the industry—he has been rousing the Tory faithful against Europe and rubbishing the case for a distinctive Scottish beef industry to receive the distinctive treatment that it merits. The crisis was in its seventh month before the Secretary of State for Scotland could bring himself to engage in talks with our European partners. Even then, he was playing second fiddle to the Minister of Agriculture. It is uncertain what one could expect to be achieved by a man who banned the European flag on Europe day, but he certainly failed the Scottish agriculture industry.

The Florence agreement must be honoured. The accelerated selective cull is the Scottish beef industry's passport into Europe and the industry wants it immediately. If the Secretary of State for Scotland has not made that plain to the Minister of Agriculture, he has done no job for Scotland. There is nothing in the Florence agreement which prevents Scotland from proceeding alone with the selective slaughter. Franz Fischler has already confirmed that fact in a meeting with the Scottish National Farmers Union in Brussels. The block on progress lies not in Brussels but in London.

With growing indications that consideration is being given to some sort of regional approach, the Secretary of State's inaction has raised the prospect of Northern Ireland securing an early exemption from the ban. We welcome the Government's acceptance of the logic of a regional or zonal approach. Scotland must be in the vanguard of that approach, along with Northern Ireland, for the same reasons.

The livelihoods of 6,000 people are at stake. The future of an important Scottish industry must not be neglected because of the Scottish Office's failure to act. The extent of its inaction was highlighted last week when Lord Lindsay pledged urgently to introduce computerised cattle traceability. That announcement was quickly followed by the revelation that only two years ago the Scottish Office rejected a proposal for just such a computerised database, which would have guaranteed cattle traceability.

In 1994, Brian Pack, chief executive of the beef conglomerate, Aberdeen and Northern Marts Ltd., commissioned a successful feasibility study into the computerisation of traceability of cattle covered by a quality assurance programme. Mr. Pack was sufficiently encouraged by the results to approach the Scottish Office. At that time, the Scottish Office rejected the proposals. It now argues that the advent of BSE has produced a changed situation. Given that the Government had a solution in their hands from day one, why has it taken eight months of crisis for them merely to take note of that proposal? Had the scheme been introduced at that time, it would have been up and running now. The solution has been available, but the Government have opted instead for inaction.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): If the ban were lifted only for Scotland, that might satisfy the hon. Gentleman, but it would not necessarily persuade European producers to buy Scottish beef as it would still be coming from the United Kingdom. One has to overcome consumer resistance as well as Community barriers.

Mr. Welsh: We should put it to the test. We know that there is a demand on the continent of Europe for prime Scottish beef. I represent the Angus part of Aberdeen Angus. I know how popular that meat is and that there is a market for it. It is important to breach the blanket European ban, and the key to achieving that lies in Scotland and Northern Ireland. That is what I am arguing for. A selective slaughter programme would be over in weeks. A computerised traceability scheme could be introduced within three months. If that had been undertaken when the problem first arose, the beef industries in Scotland and Northern Ireland would be up and running. The sooner that is done, the sooner we can make the breakthrough.

The Scottish Office has been dilatory. The marketing initiative to promote Scottish beef was promised in May, but we had to wait five long months before it was launched. It seems fair that the first target for lobbying should be the Ministry of Agriculture. A sign of the times can be seen at the restaurant in Kew gardens run by MAFF, which has a sign clearly stating that it serves only foreign beef. If the Government genuinely want to promote beef, the recovery in confidence could begin if they did something about that—assuming that they have any influence in Kew gardens.

I cannot underestimate the importance for the Scottish economy of lifting the beef export ban. Ninety per cent. of Scottish agriculture is in less-favoured areas. The industry is essential to rural communities, where there are few viable alternative industries, partly as a result of the withdrawal by the Government of a constructive regional economic policy. The Government have failed the Scottish beef industry in the past eight months. I urge them to act while there is still an industry to save.

The Government have a key to breaking through the European ban and it could be implemented right away in Scotland. The lower incidence of BSE in Scotland shows that with a combination of a selective slaughter programme and a computerised traceability scheme Scotland would be ready within a short time to get back into Europe and, with Northern Ireland, to lead the rest of the United Kingdom industry back into its lost markets. Anything less would be a sign of continuing failure by a bungling, blundering Government.

8.53 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): As much as I enjoy the company of the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) on the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, I must take exception not only to his poor sense of humour when referring to my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, but to some of his assertions. He said that we have made no progress towards the restoration of the beef industry. To say that we have made no progress when we are about to slaughter 1 million cattle stretches credibility too far.

The hon. Gentleman's other assertion—that we are prepared to sacrifice an entire industry—is arrant nonsense. How could we sacrifice an entire industry when we have put £2.5 billion of taxpayers' money into it?

Mr. Welsh: The Government are repairing the damage that they caused. We heard from the Minister's own lips that he has not even begun to put the introductory working documents to Europe. No wonder there is no timetable for ending the ban: the Government have not even reached first base.

Mr. Atkinson: I am glad to see my right hon. and learned Friend sitting on the Front Bench. He has done a tremendous amount in what has been a hugely difficult crisis. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) likened it to the Falklands campaign. The logistical problems of dealing with that number of cattle are fantastic. A million cattle carcases mean we shall have to dispose of about half a million tonnes of animal. It is a huge operation. The Intervention Board and Ministry of Agriculture officials, who have never dealt with such a problem before and have put this scheme together from scratch, deserve our congratulations, not brickbats from the hon. Member for Angus, East.

The unresolved mystery is what the shadow Foreign Shadow was doing opening the debate for the Opposition at 3.30 pm. What does he know about agricultural matters? Why should he be the one to introduce the Opposition debate? All credit to the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook): as always, he made an entertaining speech. He is an extremely good orator, but why was he chosen? I can hazard a guess. If one has little to say, it is best to say it well and hope that people listen to the way one has said it and not to the content of one's speech. I suspect that, because the Opposition had so little to say about this matter, and about what they would do, they chose the right hon. Member for Livingston to open the debate, not the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang).

Farmers in my constituency in Northumberland want not sophistry or oratory but practical solutions to a difficult problem, so that they can make plans for the future of their business. That is what they have been getting from my right hon. and learned Friend and his team. I am glad to congratulate them, because they have had to deal with an unknown problem and with changing scientific evidence arriving seemingly by the day. They have done a first-class job in extremely difficult circumstances. Most of those in the farming industry will be grateful to them. I should like to include the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who came to my constituency and addressed farmers. He left them feeling far more certain about their future.

It is natural for farmers to get angry and upset when they do not know what is happening or what the future holds. If I could make any criticism of my right hon. and learned Friend, it would be over the decision to cut compensatory payments that was taken in Brussels. I entirely understand, and do not argue with, the reasons for that action. It is quite wrong for people who send cattle to be destroyed to receive more money than they would if those cattle were destined for human consumption. I also think it wrong for those with dairy herds to use taxpayers' money to "refresh" their herds by culling cows. Apart from anything else, that increases the backlog and makes the problem worse.

I do not argue with the reasons for cutting the amount; but, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) pointed out not long ago, farmers who had been waiting to get rid of their cattle felt angry about the fact that they had been financially disadvantaged, while those who had taken a chance and sold their cattle to dealers obtained a higher price. In Northumberland, we have a large number of suckler cow herds. Suckler cows cannot be got rid of until the calves are weaned, and by the time they had been weaned, the amount of compensation had been reduced.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have expressed views about the accelerated cull. I shall not add to that, nor tell my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister what I think he should do. He has the very difficult job of balancing two interests. As we have heard tonight, the National Farmers Union takes one view and the Country Landowners Association another. I think that most of us would be happy with an accelerated cull if we felt that there would be a substantial chance of the export ban being lifted, but, if there is no such chance, the cull will surely disrupt some farmers, at great expense to taxpayers. As was pointed out earlier, it is not just a question of extending the cull rate by two weeks; compensation for cattle involved in the accelerated cull would have to be much higher, and it would be a much trickier scheme all told.

I am interested by the debate about whether Northern Ireland should be acting as a pathfinder, testing the bona fides of the European Union. That proposal was mentioned several times this evening, and the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) dealt with it in some detail. It has a good deal of superficial attraction, and I understand why those in Northern Ireland are very much in favour of it. Farmers in Northumberland, however, will be asking this question: if the Government went ahead and used Northern Ireland to persuade the European Union to lift the barrier, what effect would that have on the Scottish and English markets?

As we heard from the hon. Member for North Antrim, Northern Ireland has lost its export markets. The hon. Gentleman said that Northern Ireland could go to the Netherlands and get those markets back, but, if it could not, what would it do with its beef? Northern Irish beef would bear the gold star of EC approval, it would be bought and sold in this country and in Scotland, and it would displace the domestic beef markets from those two countries. That is what we would risk if we proceeded in

that way with Northern Ireland. I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister to give careful consideration to the impact of departing from the idea of a UK solution to the problem.

I hope that the industry can now begin to look forward to a more certain future. I would be very interested to see proposals suggesting what we could do to safeguard the future of the beef industry in the coming years. At present, the export industry occupies 28 per cent. of our beef market, and the cull represents roughly 25 per cent. The export and the cull are almost balanced. What is missing is 15 per cent. Our beef consumption constitutes only 85 per cent: 15 per cent. is, at it were, going astray. We must decide what to do with that in the future.

There are a number of options. One is intervention, which is becoming increasingly unattractive. I think that intervention beef will be virtually impossible to get rid of in future, particularly because it is not traceable. We can cut production by means of, for instance, the calf slaughter scheme, which provides a valuable way of taking dairy beef out of the beef market. There is much merit in trying to reduce the quantity of dairy beef going into the market. If we want to get the beef market back, that would be better done with purpose-bred beef herds than with beef from the dairy sector.

The third option is to increase promotion. In recent months, very successful promotion campaigns have been run by the Meat and Livestock Commission and other parts of the industry. We have seen the start of a return to the consumption of forequarter meat, which is long overdue. Promotion is very cheap in comparison with the figures that we have talked about tonight. We are talking about £2.5 billion; £2.5 million would go a long way towards increasing the promotion of beef.

I think that the British farmer has been well served by the Government. I have no hesitation in going to my farmers and telling them that, whatever they say, this Government and this party will look after the interests of the beef industry—something that no other party would do. We have had nothing from Opposition Members apart from the use of their marvellous 20:20 hindsight vision, and nothing but empty rhetoric from the right hon. Member for Livingston. The Government and their Ministers will save the beef industry.

9.4 pm

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): The attitude of my farmers in west Wales is completely different from that which the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) has perhaps experienced in north England because my farmers have been extremely angry for many months. That was certainly made clear to me at last month's National Farmers Union lobby, where, as the Minister of Agriculture will know, members of the farming community were seeking the return of capital punishment, but for one individual alone: the Minister.

I was staggered by the Minister's speech, particularly bearing in mind the comments of hon. Members on both sides of the House on the need for a strategy that is workable, practicable and will implement the Florence agreement, which, we were told on 24 June, would, in five stages, move us towards the lifting of the export ban. Both in today's statement and in his October statement, the Minister took much time to explain that it was no longer possible to implement the agreement. What he failed to do in October, and has failed to do today, is to announce what is in its place. That is what everyone in the House and, particularly, in the beef sector wants to know. If the Minister believes that the agreement is out of the window and will not be honoured by our European partners, what are the Government going to put in its place?

Bearing in mind the impact of the crisis, which has been running since March, the anger in the farming community and in the rural economy generally—not just in Wales but throughout Britain—is utterly understandable. It is worth reiterating the figures that were referred to by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) from the Institute of Rural Studies at the University college of Wales at Aberystwyth. They show that, in rural Wales, this year, a loss of between £30 million and £40 million is predicted, with a knock-on effect on more than 2,000 jobs.

In a constituency such as mine, which has some of the highest unemployment not just in Wales, but in the UK, any detrimental impact on the local economy, from whatever source, is of great concern. I will illustrate for the Minister some of the impact that the crisis is having on my constituents.

This week, a farmer, Mr. William George, of Hasguard near Haverfordwest, gave my office figures on his turnover. For the first seven months of this year, it is down by £100,000. Profits are down by £60,000. He believes that he may just break even this year, and he says that he will not invest in new equipment. I receive letters from my local agricultural equipment suppliers saying, basically, that the market has dried up, but is that any wonder when the turnover of such a large beef producer has been cut by £100,000 in the seven months since the crisis began?

If the Florence agreement is, in the Government's view, no longer operational and will not work, the Minister of State must at least tell the House and the farming community what will be put in its place.

The hon. Member for Hexham referred to the 20:20 hindsight of Opposition Members. I do not think that that is a fair comment; at Agriculture Question Time, and when various statements had been made, Opposition Members and, to be fair, Tory Members, have raised specific issues. For example, we all asked about the registration scheme. Had that been in place, we would at least have known the size of the problem and the shortfalls in slaughtering and rendering capacity would have been identified. Why did it take the Government so long to get to grips with those problems by, for example, examining obvious alternatives such as increasing freezer capacity?

The Government warrant justified criticism and must accept it because they made fundamental errors that were pointed out to them not just in this place but by the farming unions. It took an awfully long time for the Ministry and its Ministers to address those serious problems.

At the lobby organised last month by the NFU, I learnt how desperate farmers have become. They do not believe they can get through this winter because of a lack of fodder—the dry summer means that fodder is in short supply—and they asked whether we could persuade the Government to opt for open-field incineration. That shows how desperate they are, because they know that the incineration of huge mounds of carcases will have a

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negative impact on consumer confidence, but they accept that. They are desperate because they have not got the necessary feed for their animals throughout the winter.

Mr. Corbett: Is my hon. Friend aware of reports that some abattoirs are finding it difficult to find animals to slaughter because of the bureaucratic way in which the Intervention Board is handling the matter?

Mr. Ainger: Yes, I am aware of those reports. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks) referred to the situation that was described on "Newsnight", where cattle in the south-west were being transported to the north of England for slaughter when right next door to the collection centre was an abattoir that was slaughtering cattle that had been transported considerable distances to it. Enormous bureaucratic mistakes have been made, which again have been pointed out to the Ministry either directly across the Floor of the House or in letters to it. It has taken an unacceptably long time to address those problems.

The farming industry is genuinely desperate. This afternoon, I had a conversation with one of my constituents who not only discussed the problem of winter fodder, but raised an issue of which I was unaware. Because of the increased number of cattle that some farmers will be forced to keep this winter, there is a real problem to do with slurry. There is potential for serious incidents of pollution because farmers' operations have been geared to a certain number of cattle, but they must now keep more on their farms while they await a decision on the slaughter scheme. They have a genuine fear that pollution could be caused as a result of a slurry overspill. It would really rub farmers' noses in it, and quite literally, if they were then faced with fines, as well as the cash shortfall that they have experienced in the past few months.

I said to the Whips that I would not speak for longer than 10 minutes, so let me say in conclusion that this crisis has had an enormous impact not just on the farming community but on the rural community as a whole. I have already referred to the fact that the suppliers to the farming industry have taken a hammering. As I said, the agricultural equipment suppliers face a significant shortfall in their market and have laid off people.

I do not believe that the Government realised sufficiently early the seriousness of the situation. If they had, even they would have put in place measures to address the real issue, which was lack of capacity in the slaughtering industry and in the rendering sector. Even now, we have not got to grips with the issue. I drew to the attention of the Under–Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans), a crazy situation in which an abattoir that processed only clean beef for supermarkets wanted to take over a neighbouring slaughterhouse that had not been operated for just over a year. The company had approval, yet it was told—directly by the Under-Secretary—that it could not use that slaughterhouse because the rules of the scheme stated that only slaughterhouses operational at the start of the scheme could be used. That company had already set up rendering capacity.

In his reply to the debate, I hope that the Minister will tell us what will replace the Florence agreement if it has been thrown out by the Government.

9.15 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): The hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) said that his farmers are angry. Of course they are angry: every farmer in the United Kingdom is angry. Across the UK, most people, irrespective of whether they are involved in agriculture, are angry about BSE, CJD and the cull requirements. But I doubt whether any other Government would have been able to find the £2.45 billion compensation that the Government have put into agriculture.

The Opposition motion is particularly cynical, as was the speech of the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). If we were to score his speech, and analyse the solutions presented in it, it would receive nine for presentation and zero for content.

As sad as it was, the statement in March 1996 had to be made. Perhaps we would not be facing the current serious situation if there had been a bit of unity in the House then—but that is water under the bridge. Since then, however, the situation has occasionally worsened. The media come up with issues related to BSE and CJD that add nothing to our knowledge but which cause great anxieties in the marketplace, after the Government have tried to build up the market's support.

Action taken in the 1980s dealt with the risks presented by BSE and CJD. I remind hon. Members that, last Christmas, the market put pressure on the Government not to impose stringently the requirement to remove parts of the carcase from the food chain. Very wisely, the pressure was resisted.

I deeply resent the cull requirements. I resent the 30-month requirement, although I compliment the Government on how that cull has been executed. It has been a massive task, with massive, built-in unknowns, but it has almost been achieved. I resent the selective cull just as much. Today, I heard the Pope speaking to the world food conference, in Rome. He directed his remarks to people who are starving. Let us think about that. Shamefully, we are wasting good-quality food. Future generations will look back to this time and wonder what Europe was doing wasting food on such a scale.

I believe that the selective cull is nothing but a marketing exercise. We signed up to it in Florence, however, and we have to proceed with it—as the Scottish National Farmers Union recognised when the deal was struck. Since then, the NFU has followed that pattern. It is now time for us to meet that commitment.

The Scottish beef industry is a quality industry. It has been well backed by the Scottish Office in recent times. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has found additional resources to promote it—he met its representatives through the summer—and its quality aspects. Such support is very important, and has been welcomed by the industry as a whole. Indeed, only this week, Sandy Mole, the president of the NFU in Scotland, complimented my right hon. Friend on the support for BSE and a number of other issues. [HON. MEMBERS: "No, he didn't."] If Opposition Members care to read Sandy Mole's report, they will find that he did.

Others have not helped marketing. Reference has been made to McDonald's, but I would like to include Burger King, too. It is totally wrong that it is selling Dutch beef to our children. Industries in such countries cannot reach the same levels of traceability as the United Kingdom beef industry. I say to all citizens in the UK, "Forget about

McDonald's and Burger King. They are a disgrace to this country. Let's use Wimpy, which has at least supported the industry."

I argue very strongly for Northern Ireland. It is an integral part of the United Kingdom, and I honestly believe that, on this issue, the countries of the United Kingdom must stand together. I recognise that that cuts across the wishes of right hon. and hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland, but I believe that in this Union of ours we stand together. I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to get stuck into the selective cull, so that we can clear up the problem as best we can.

9.21 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): We have had a very useful debate. All hon. Members have expressed the concerns held by people in the industry across the length and breadth of the country—Scotland, Wales and England. It is fair to say that there has been a particular focus on Northern Ireland, and that hon. Members who represent it have made very powerful speeches. I think that the whole House understands why that has been so. I shall comment on Northern Ireland at greater length later.

It is valuable to remind ourselves that the underlying, fundamental concern in the debate on BSE is, of course, one of public health. There is a new variant of CJD, and 14 cases of it have occurred. We do not know whether that new variant has been caused by BSE, or how many more cases of it there will be. Obviously, we desperately hope that there will be very few. We know that, in the 1980s, when it became clear that BSE was a major issue, the Government acted too slowly and quite inadequately. We should remember that it was always understood from the very beginning that there was a possibility—albeit, as it was argued at times, a remote one—of a link between BSE in cattle and CJD in humans.

There were delays in implementing the regulations to protect human health, and when they were put in place, they were badly enforced. The Government have admitted that under-compensation in the 18 months between August 1988 and February 1990 for the slaughter of suspect cases of BSE will have deterred farmers from keeping out of the human food chain cattle that they suspected of having BSE. The Minister admitted that that under-compensation was contributory.

We also know that it took two years and seven months after BSE was officially identified before it was announced that steps would be taken to keep bovine specified material out of our food. Three years after BSE was identified—November 1989—the regulations were put in place in England and Wales. In January 1990, they came into force in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Concern was expressed at the time about the effectiveness with which the regulations were implemented.

Particular attention has rightly been focused on the fact that the ruminant feed ban put in place in 1988 was clearly not enforced. It is generally accepted that the sole cause—or at least the main cause—of BSE in our cattle was the eating of feed contaminated with ruminant protein. It has been admitted that the animals in this country continued to get contaminated feed. Indeed, the report of the Agra Europe meat conference 1996 states that Richard Cowan of the Ministry of Agriculture said on 8 October that lax controls over contaminated feed meant that it was not until 1 August this year—1 August this year—that the Government could be 100 per cent. confident that all stocks of contaminated feed and any risk of cross-contamination of feed had been entirely eliminated from our farms.

Over all these years, contaminated feed was continuing to reach our cattle. That is not unrelated to the Government's treatment of the state veterinary service over the years—the way in which it was run down, reorganised and totally demoralised.

Eight years after the ruminant feed ban was introduced, this has to be the overwhelming reason why more than 28,000 cases of BSE have been confirmed in cattle born after the feed ban and why two thirds of all new BSE cases now coming through are in animals born after the introduction of that ban.

On 20 March, the Secretary of State for Health reported to the House that Government scientists had advised Ministers that BSE was thought to be the most likely cause of the new variant of CJD. The Government were clearly unprepared for the impact of their announcement on consumers and thus on the industry. The Minister of Agriculture told the House:

"I do not believe that this information should damage consumer confidence and thus the beef market."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. 387.]

It was clear, and became clearer as the days, weeks and months passed, that the Government had no strategy to deal with the crisis. Our rural communities are still paying the price for that terrible misjudgment. The same confusion characterised the Government's handling of the issue with our European Union partners.

On 3 April the Government announced that all cattle over the age of 30 months were to be banned from human food. The Ministry of Agriculture press release of 16 April said that the slaughter programme would start on 29 April. By the end of May, the Government's 30-month slaughter programme had hardly started. Information from the Government to farmers was poor, confused and late and the slaughtering capacity was insufficient and poorly distributed. Widespread reports came through of dealers and abattoirs profiteering on the compulsory scheme, buying cattle from desperate farmers at knock-down prices. Abattoirs have been paid too much for too long.

Five months into the scheme, on 12 September, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster announced that the Government did not know how many cattle were in the backlog to be slaughtered under the 30-month scheme. Only then did they embark on a survey to assess the size of the backlog. It was estimated at 400,000 animals. That figure has now been reduced. The Minister has confirmed today that the Government expect the backlog to be completed by mid-December.

Let us not forget—several hon. Members have focused attention on this—that a number of farmers have kept the animals on their farms since the over-30-month scheme came into operation in April. They now find their rate of compensation cut. The cost to those farmers of keeping the animals has been much greater than the cost to farmers who got their animals away early on in the scheme.

Hon. Members will recall that the Agriculture Council decided on 2 April that the United Kingdom should bring forward proposals for a selective slaughter scheme for the cattle most at risk of BSE.

First, the Minister proposed slaughtering around 42,000 cattle; that was in April. In May, the figure was increased to 80,000 cattle. It was then reduced again to 42,000, and

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finally, in June, at the Florence summit, the Prime Minister agreed that there would be a selective slaughter programme involving probably around 147,000 cattle.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) pointed out earlier this afternoon, the Prime Minister was keen to present the Florence agreement as a great victory—a great achievement for the British Government. The agreement is at the heart of the debate, and I will remind the House what the Prime Minister said. On 24 June, he said:

"We aim to be in a position to tell the Commission by October that we have met the necessary conditions for decisions to lift the ban on two of the five stages—that is, certified herds and animals born after a specified date and their meat. That is subject in particular to clearance of the backlog of animals awaiting slaughter in the 30-month-plus scheme, and a start to the accelerated slaughter of cattle particularly at risk of developing BSE."

He went on to explain that removal of the ban would, in the first instance, enable us to allow the export of meat up to the value of £100 million. He then said:

"Also by October, I expect a Commission proposal on a third stage—embryos—subject to the scientists giving them a clean bill of health."

The whole point was that the exports would build up,

"increasing rapidly thereafter as the certified herds scheme gains momentum."—[*Official Report*, 24 June 1996; Vol. 280, c. 21.]

Indeed, on the very last day before the House broke up for the summer recess, the Minister of Agriculture stated, referring to the Florence agreement:

"The agreement was a great success, and provides a solid way forward. The framework also provides for the introduction by the United Kingdom of a programme for accelerating the decline of bovine spongiform encephalopathy."—[*Official Report*, 24 July 1996; Vol. 282, c. 369.]

So what happened after the House went into recess at the end of July? First, we had the partial results of the experiment on maternal transmission; then we had the publication of the paper by Professor Roy Anderson and his colleagues at Oxford. Those developments made a case for redirecting the selective slaughter programme, and the Commission accepted that. The response to those developments should have been to maintain the momentum behind the Florence agreement by redirecting the selective slaughter programme, which, on the basis of the new information, could be more effective.

Let us be clear that the experiment has shown that there is no, or only slight, maternal transmission—that we can rule out maternal transmission on a major scale. The importance of the Roy Anderson paper was that it enabled the Government to redirect their selective slaughter programme more effectively. The Government were given good advice, on the basis of statistical analysis, on how, with a given kill rate, they could reduce the number of BSE cases by even more than was envisaged at the time of the Florence agreement.

I cannot accept that those developments justify what has happened since. The Government used those scientific developments to walk away from the Florence agreement. Let us be clear that the scientific developments meant that the agreement reached at Florence could be more effective. This afternoon, the Minister of Agriculture made great play of the fact that we would still be left with about two thirds of the BSE cases. If we implemented the selective slaughter programme, between now and 2001—when, we hope, very few BSE cases will be left—we could reduce the number of cases by about a third. Surely that is worth achieving.

The Commission always made it clear that it would judge the selective slaughter programme not on the number of cows killed, but on the likely reduction in the number of BSE cases. I put it fairly and squarely to the Minister: if it was right to agree in Florence in June to that selective slaughter programme, it cannot have been right to walk away from it in September, because the only developments that had taken place since were ones that were likely to make the programme more rather than less effective.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I think that the House would like an answer to this question. If the Government come forward with a selective cull programme involving all the 128,000 beasts referred to in the Florence agreement, will the Opposition support us, and will the hon. Gentleman give a guarantee to that effect?

Dr. Strang: Of course. It would be nonsense for us to advocate that we would implement the Florence agreement and then vote against the means of doing so. Naturally, we would need to look at the details of the order, but we would not stand in the way of implementing the agreement.

The debate has revealed that all hon. Members representing all parts of the United Kingdom, even those who were initially against implementing the Florence agreement and the selective slaughter programme—and I can understand why—now support it. The Minister's intervention has confirmed that the House wants the selective slaughter programme to be implemented, and the only ones standing in its way and thus failing to honour the Florence agreement are the Government.

Mr. Home Robertson: When will they bring in the order?

Dr. Strang: My hon. Friend asks when the Government will bring in the order.

The Cabinet announced in September that they were suspending the selective slaughter programme. On 28 October, I heard the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster say on Radio 4:

"We accept the Florence agreement and we intend to comply with it. We intend to implement a selective cull programme once we are in a position to do so under a Union banner."

I am not sure what he meant by that. Then, no fewer than five Ministers attended the Council of Ministers meeting in Luxembourg.

Since July, when it seemed that the Government were intent on implementing the selective slaughter programme, we have had the suspension of the selective slaughter programme, followed by an assurance from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster that it would go ahead. Now we are no further forward. I defy any hon. Member to tell me whether the Government intend to implement the selective slaughter programme and honour their side of the Florence agreement. I appeal to the Minister to give us a clear statement on that when he replies to the debate, particularly in view of the overwhelming opinion of hon. Members that we should comply with the Florence agreement and implement the selective slaughter programme.

Hon. Members will recall that the Opposition were less than enchanted with the Florence agreement. However, the Government insisted that the timetable was as solid as the Prime Minister described it and that our farmers and meat industry should accept it in good faith. Now we are nearly two weeks into November, and well past the Prime Minister's deadlines for lifting the ban, yet the beef export ban is still 100 per cent. in place and beef farmers have been given no idea about the Government's policy or when they can expect any progress to be made towards the lifting of the ban.

It is no wonder that our farmers are distraught, or that the National Farmers Union passed a vote of no confidence in the Minister and the National Farmers Union of Scotland called on the Prime Minister to

"take charge of policy on the beef crisis, which has now become a bumbling shambles."

It is vital that the beef ban is lifted. Only the European Union can do that, and the Florence agreement is the only mechanism currently on the table.

[Interruption.] Attention has rightly been focused on Northern Ireland, where the beef industry is disproportionately more important. Farming is more important there, and exports are more important to the beef industry. Traditionally, more than half the beef produced in Northern Ireland is exported, and an additional quarter goes to mainland Britain. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is such despair in Northern Ireland.

The same is true of Scotland, where exports affect a large part of the beef industry, which is of particular importance to the Scottish economy. Given the low incidence of BSE in Northern Ireland and the exceptional cattle database operating there, it would make sense for Northern Ireland to lead the United Kingdom out of the beef ban. Right hon. and hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland constituencies will agree that any agreement that gave terms for lifting the export ban in Northern Ireland, but included conditions that meant that other parts of the United Kingdom, particularly Scotland, had no prospect of having the ban lifted in the short to medium term, would be unacceptable.

Obviously, the farming industry throughout Britain has accepted that, if we go ahead with the certified herds scheme, in the first instance the vast bulk of those certified herds will be in Northern Ireland. The debate has revealed not only the overwhelming support for implementing the Florence agreement, but the incredulity felt by all hon. Members—not just those representing Northern Ireland—when the Minister sought to explain to us that, after all these months, the Government have still not managed to submit the formal working document to the Commission as a basis for progress to be made and the decision to be taken to implement the certified herds scheme.

Let us be under no illusions. There is tremendous hardship and suffering in our farming industry. For example, people have invested a whole lifetime's work in building up a pedigree beef herd. It may be their livelihood and their investment, but it is also their lifetime's work. They have built a herd that has never had BSE and that is never likely to have BSE, yet they find that their lifetime's work and their livelihood have been put in jeopardy. Young farmers, perhaps, who borrowed money to move into a hill farm in the past few years and whose farms are heavily dependent on beef suckler herds, are on the verge of bankruptcy. Their businesses are on the verge of collapse through no fault of their own.

Hundreds of jobs have been lost in the industry. This morning, we had an excellent debate on the impact of the crisis on cattle head deboners. Tremendous strength of feeling and concern was demonstrated by hon. Members, who rightly argued the case for that industry which, overnight, was wiped out through no fault of its own. There can be no disagreement about the scale and the depth of the suffering in the industry as a result of what has happened. BSE is the biggest crisis to hit British agriculture this century.

The crisis has rightly been the preoccupation of hon. Members on both sides of the House. BSE was always going to cause the industry problems, but the Government's handling of the issue has compounded the problems, cost jobs and damaged livelihoods. It is right that the House of Commons should pass judgment on how the Government have handled the BSE crisis. We owe that to our constituents, to farmers and the industry. I urge hon. Members to vote for the Opposition motion.

9.41 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Tony Baldry): This has been a long six-hour debate, in which many constructive points have been raised. I intend to try to respond to them. I may, towards the end of my remarks, have some things to say about the Opposition and their approach, but in fairness to the farming community I should deal constructively with the constructive points that have been raised.

Since March, we have had only one duty—to seek to protect consumer health and confidence and to help the farming community and everybody associated with the beef industry. The over-30-month scheme sprang from that duty. Why did it come about? The hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks) and others seem to be under some misunderstanding on that point. The scheme came about because SEAC recommended that all beef from cattle over 30 months should be deboned. Immediately, the supermarkets said that they would take no beef from cattle over 30 months, and that meant that there was no longer a market for that beef. The supermarkets and the farmers came to the Government and asked us to provide a scheme that took that beef out of the system and ensured compensation for the farmers. That we have done.

The scheme is a huge logistical exercise. Much of the beef would previously have gone into the food chain, and now all of it has to be rendered. There is a finite rendering capacity, and it was an enormous logistical exercise to bring together slaughterhouses, rendering capacity and refrigeration capacity. Inevitably, bringing on some of that refrigeration capacity took time, but I am fully confident that at no time could we have slaughtered any more animals than we have slaughtered. We have now slaughtered more than 870,000 animals. At the present rate, we are slaughtering them at the rate of more than 55,000 a week. Last week, nearly 60,000 animals were slaughtered.

People were rightly concerned about the backlog, so we introduced a registration scheme, which means that those who have registered will be given priority for their cattle

[Mr. Tony Baldry]

to be slaughtered. I am confident that we will have cleared the backlog by Christmas. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) was correct to say that, of the 320,000 animals that have been registered, almost 100,000 have already been slaughtered. I was asked about the capacity of the scheme. Once the registered cattle have been slaughtered, there is more than adequate weekly capacity to deal with any animals that come forward from the over-30-month scheme. Once the backlog is cleared, those who are bringing cattle to be slaughtered under that scheme should have no difficulties.

It is right that the House should appreciate that, on the basis of past Intervention Board records, we had every reason to expect that we would have to deal with 1 million animals in 12 months. In fact, we will have dealt with 1 million animals in seven months. We owe a debt of thanks to officials, to the Intervention Board and to many throughout the industry who have worked extremely hard to tackle an enormous logistical exercise.

We have given considerable support to farmers: including £81 million in suckler cow and beef special premiums, £29 million for beef marketing payments schemes, £60 million for hill livestock compensatory allowances, a further £29 million for a second beef marketing payment scheme, and aid worth about £50 million which we intend to spend in ways of particular benefit to suckler producers.

We have given aid of up to £118 million to the rendering industry. Similarly, £110 million has been provided to the slaughtering industry to provide a breathing space during which companies can adjust to the new marketing circumstances.

We have appreciated the enormous difficulties that farmers have faced throughout all this. My right hon. and hon. Friends in MAFF, the Scottish Office, the Welsh Office and the Northern Ireland Office have met farmers from throughout the country almost on a daily basis. I am grateful to the NFU for its fair acknowledgement in the briefing that it sent to hon. Members today. It said:

"on behalf of the farming community the NFU is grateful for the sympathy, substantial practical assistance and extensive public expenditure that has been devoted by Government to tackling this unprecedented crisis in British agriculture."

That is a fair summary by the NFU. On behalf of all Ministers present, I should like to say thank you to the NFU for recognising what the Opposition were so curmudgeonly not to recognise—that throughout we have sought to act positively and constructively.

Mr. Welsh: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Baldry: We have had a six-hour debate, in which a large number of points were made. I intend to try to reply to those points.

Several hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir J. Spicer) criticised the decision to reduce the cull cow compensation rate. Let me deal with that. Historically, the cull cow price is about two thirds of the clean beef price. By fixing and keeping the cull cow rate at 85p a kilo when the clean beef price was only 10p or so higher, we introduced economic incentives for farmers to hold on to cattle so that they qualified for the over-30-month scheme instead of selling their beasts at an earlier age for consumption. Moreover, we created the opportunity for farmers to reshape their herds using the over-30-month scheme as the means.

In addition, the rate of 85p a kilo was higher than the rate being paid in other member states for beef for the food chain. That was clearly untenable, particularly as 70 per cent. of the cost is funded by the Community. I do not blame farmers for doing what they did, but neither of those consequences was desirable or intended, and it was right that the rate was changed. I of course appreciate the concerns that, for those who had not managed to get their cattle through the OTMS, the change seemed unfair because it looked as if it was retrospective, but without a registration scheme there was nothing that we could do about it. We just could not continue as we were. I have to say to the House that, given the circumstances, I do not believe that we could ever get perfect equity. One cannot achieve perfect equity among all producers.

My hon. Friends have raised concerns about particular groups. We had a debate this morning on head deboners. I told my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) and others who took part in that debate that I was more than willing to meet representatives of the head deboning industry to hear at first hand their concerns.

I am also aware that some of my hon. Friends have been concerned that certain abattoirs have not yet been able to participate in culling cattle as part of the over-30-month scheme. The present agreements with the slaughterers expire on 31 March next year. By early December, the Intervention Board will invite expressions of interest from the industry in participating in the continuing cull after 31 March.

The debate has, understandably, moved on to a debate in large part on the selective cull. I think that all my hon. Friends will agree that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister achieved a good outcome at Florence in that he succeeded in achieving an agreed process with our European colleagues which until that time they had not agreed.

During the summer, we reconsidered our position on the selective cull for reasons that I shall explain to the House in more detail. I and my right hon. and hon. Friends have been interested to hear the comments of the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. If orders are brought to the House, I am sure that we can look forward to their full support in introducing the necessary statutory instruments for a cull. That is the first time today that such an offer appears to have been forthcoming.

Before the summer, there was considerable opposition from farming unions to a selective cull. We all remember stories about farmers at their farm gates with shotguns, and there was scant support from Opposition parties for such a cull. In fairness, the position of the farming unions turned around completely during the summer, and they are now broadly in support of some kind of cull. In May, the NFU told us:

"The NFU could not, however, support any culling scheme that was not linked to a clear framework for a progressive and rapid lifting of the export ban".

Just before the House rose in July, the NFU said that it believed that

"an additional slaughter programme is unjustified on scientific grounds".

As recently as 11 September, the Country Landowners Association said that it

"continues to be against the Government's present policy on the Accelerated Slaughter Scheme."

There has now been something of a change in the NFU and the CLA, and that has been reflected in the farming unions elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The NFU briefing for this debate said:

"It is essential that there is a UK-wide selective cull".

I emphasise that, and I hope that those hon. Members who have not taken part in this debate, or who have been unable to attend all of it, will read *Hansard* tomorrow. There have been many expressions of a desire to get on with a selective cull, but there have been almost as many variants of how that cull should best be taken forward. The NFU is now saying that there should be

"a UK-wide selective cull to ensure that farmers in different regions of the UK are not disadvantaged . . . the only prospect of obtaining an early lifting of the export ban is for the British Government to carry out what it committed itself to doing in Florence this summer."

Mr. Home Robertson: Will the Minister of State give way?

Mr. Baldry: No. The hon. Gentleman has made his speech, and I am seeking to respond to some important points.

The CLA has now changed its tune:

"The Government must review its original proposals for a selective cull in the light of developments since they were first developed and communicate its findings to the EU Commission."

We have not walked away from a selective cull. Instead, there has been a complete turnround in the attitude of the farming unions, and a number of other matters have changed in important ways.

First, Professor Anderson and his team published their findings in *Nature* in August which indicated that the epidemic will virtually die out around 2001, irrespective of any further measures, that the targeting in the original selective cull proposals could be improved and that there might be other possible approaches. We also received the preliminary results from the Government's maternal transmission experiment, one interpretation of which could indicate an element of transmission of BSE from dam to calf.

It was clear that further work on culling options was needed, and we made it clear in the late summer that we were not proceeding for the moment with the selective cull as set out in the UK's eradication programme. It was never ruled out, and we have studied the scientific evidence in consultation with our European partners. We have never ruled out the possibility of moving forward on some form of selective cull, and there are strong arguments in favour of it. A sharper reduction in the number of BSE cases in the next few years will help to give consumers extra reassurance and steady markets both here and abroad.

It is important to state that even those who want a selective cull have also made clear that it is worth moving towards such a cull only if we can be sure that it will result in the lifting of the export ban. I believe that that is the position of the NFU; I am sure that it would support such a cull if we could guarantee that the export ban would be lifted. We will be looking for the unequivocal support of our European Union colleagues in this. When we have fulfilled our part of the bargain, they must fulfil theirs.

As was made clear by my hon. Friends the Members for Stafford (Mr. Cash) and for North Norfolk (Sir R. Howell), a former Agriculture Minister, we need to be sure that the Commission will honour its side of the agreement if we go ahead with a selective cull, but as other hon. Members have already made clear, the precedent on gelatine is not reassuring. We met the criteria for the export of gelatine some time ago, and we are still having problems, with practically all our European Union colleagues finding ways of not honouring their undertaking. No hon. Member will want us to proceed with a selective cull unless we can be sure that the export ban will be lifted.

Mr. William Ross *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: Of course, we understand and appreciate the situation in Northern Ireland. If a selective cull goes ahead, those in Northern Ireland are in a good position for an early start, simply because of traceability and certified herds. I am sure, however, that Northern Ireland Members will appreciate the concern of hon. Members from Scotland, England and Wales, that if a process starts in Northern Ireland it should not be to the exclusion of other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ross: Nobody from Northern Ireland has ever asked that other areas of the United Kingdom be excluded or disadvantaged in any way, but we want the Government to use the position on Northern Ireland as a test of Europe's good faith to see whether it will go along with what they signed up to.

Mr. Baldry: We understand that position, but the hon. Gentleman must understand that the farming industry in Northern Ireland and throughout the United Kingdom would be extremely frustrated if we were to start and complete a selective cull throughout the United Kingdom with no guarantee or reasonable expectation that the export ban would be lifted.

The Labour party has come somewhat late to this issue, and Labour Members have been noticeable by their absence in most previous debates on BSE. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] A handful of them have attended each debate, and it is significant that today's had to be opened by their foreign affairs spokesman, whose presence in the Chamber was notable only for its short duration.

From the beginning, Labour has treated the beef crisis as a political opportunity. It has deliberately ignored the science, and says that we have reneged on Florence, which is complete nonsense. We have taken account of the important new scientific evidence on maternal transmission and of Professor Anderson's work on the selective cull; Labour knows that, but it seeks to make political capital out of it.

Labour Members attacked our non-co-operation policy, which produced the Florence deal; now they say that we have abandoned Florence. All that gets picked up by European colleagues and confuses our message. Labour's party politicking is frustrating our efforts to lift the ban. Back in June, the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) promised to help; we have had scant help since then. In June, he said that the Florence deal was not a victory for the Prime Minister, and he described it as a massive climbdown, yet today he insists that we implement the whole deal, regardless of new evidence and of whether we will succeed in getting the ban lifted.

[Mr. Baldry]

Today is the first time that any Opposition Member has voiced any support for the selective cull. Opposition spokesmen have demonstrated scant leadership, because throughout the summer they listened to the farming unions and, now that the farming unions have changed their view, they are saying that they would support the Government if we introduced measures for a selective cull. We have taken note of that, and we will take note of everything else that has been said during today's debate. I hope that Conservative Members will recognise the motion for the opportunist rubbish that it is and will support the Government's amendment.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 302, Noes 303.

Division No. 13] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joseph
Austin–Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Cunningham, Ms R *(Perth Kinross)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Miss Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'd)*
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Sir James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert

Shore, Peter
Short, Ms Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Sir David
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, John D *(Strangf'd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel G)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'ld)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Richards, Rod
Riffkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith

Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Richard Ottaway.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 303, Noes 302.

Division No. 14] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel G)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'ld)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth

Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Richards, Rod
Rifkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Richard Ottaway.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joseph
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Cunningham, Ms R *(Perth Kinross)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Miss Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'ld)*
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'd Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Sir James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie

Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Short, Ms Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Sir David
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, John D *(Strangf'd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MADAM SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates the Government on the action it has taken to deal with the BSE crisis which has led to the restoration of consumer confidence; welcomes the package of support the Government has provided to the beef industry; notes the significant improvement in the measures to deal with the disposal of animals over 30 months of age and the progress made towards meeting the criteria set out in the agreement for lifting the European ban on British beef; and urges the Labour Party to drop its cynical political opportunism at the expense of many who depend on this important industry.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

HEALTH AND SAFETY

That the draft Health and Safety (Repeals and Revocations) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 23rd October, be approved.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Question agreed to.

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the remaining motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

INCOME TAX

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Latvia) Order 1996 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 23rd October.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Denmark) Order 1996 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 23rd October.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Finland) Order 1996 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 23rd October.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (China) Order 1996 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 23rd October.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Republic of Korea) Order 1996 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 28th October.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Question agreed to.

Land Holding (Scotland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

10.31 pm

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): I have long awaited the opportunity to have this debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I should like to thank Madam Speaker for finally selecting me to have the Adjournment debate.

Last Wednesday, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) had a debate on land reform in Scotland. I congratulate him on his success in raising the issue, which I intend to cover in more detail than the hon. Gentleman and the other hon. Members managed to do then. The hon. Gentleman admitted that he exercised some restraint when describing the behaviour and antics of Mr. Brian Hamilton, the so-called "raider of the lost titles", but I can tell the House that I intend to free myself from such restraint. I intend to speak based on my experience of meeting him. My opinion of him is not a good one, and I am sure that, having heard of that man's activities, most will share my view.

I first became aware of the problem through a local councillor for Boghead, Councillor Esther Serrels, deputy provost of South Lanarkshire council. I would like to record my thanks to and appreciation of Councillor Serrels for her outstanding and tireless work on behalf of the people of Boghead and Kirkmuirhill, who have been on the receiving end of those outdated and abused Scottish land laws.

Councillor Serrels arranged a meeting at my constituency office on 26 August, which was also attended by a delegation of Boghead residents. They informed me of a litany of harassment, threats and intimidation. For example, bank accounts had been arrested, sheriff officers had served warrants, bailiffs had evaluated household goods for warrant sales, and threats of evictions had been made, as well as repeated calls of a threatening and intimidating nature. Such calls seem to be a common feature of Mr. Hamilton's tactics.

There was the case of Mr. and Mrs. Reid. Hamilton obtained an eviction order to evict them from the home in which they had lived for the previous 20 years, after a dispute over the ownership. The previous owner was an old lady who had sold the house to the Reids for £500. She gave them a receipt for the sale, but died two weeks later, before conveyancing had been properly completed. Mr. Hamilton reputedly bought the right of claim for ownership from the old lady's family for £4,000. He sued Mr. Reid for £29,000, in addition to £11,000 in back casualty payments.

Hamilton's attitude towards the Reids was vicious and venomous, and his behaviour was abusive and derogatory. He revelled in the torment that he inflicted on the couple.

I attended a public meeting in Boghead, on 11 September 1996, and met members of the community—among whom were some ordinary people who had been living a normal life one minute, but whose lives were threatened and virtually ruined the next. Forty families have been affected in Boghead, but they have received little or no help, except for the comfort of concern expressed by each other, their local councillor and their Member of Parliament, and by some other supporters.

I decided to try to meet Mr. Hamilton to see at first hand what type of person threatens and intimidates an 88-year-old pensioner and a young widow and evicts people such as the Reids from their homes. I wrote to him, requesting a meeting. He agreed. I announced that Councillor Serrells and I would travel to Stonehaven, on Friday 27 September 1996, to discuss all the issues. Hamilton immediately released a statement to the press, stating that he would not meet with "that woman Serrells". It seems that Councillor Serrells had said something critical of his conduct—which should surprise no one.

I telephoned Hamilton, and I told him that Councillor Serrells was the local councillor, and that he was objecting to the attendance of one of the most decent, respected and admired women in the county of Lanarkshire. He reluctantly withdrew his objection to her attendance, and she and I set off to meet "the raider of the lost titles".

We decided that our approach would be to express our concerns, as expressed to us by our constituents, and then to listen to him and allow him to talk as much as possible. I was keen to discover what sort of chap he was, and he certainly displayed conduct that could be described as evil. Our meeting lasted for two hours, and the experience was worth the three-hour drive up and the three-hour drive back.

I should say something about how Hamilton behaved and operated in Boghead. Last Wednesday, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan briefly mentioned George Malone, but—understandably, because of time factors—he did not give a full account of Mr. Malone's treatment. Hamilton had initially demanded £9,000 from George Malone, an 82-year-old pensioner. He then reduced his demand to £4,800 and said, "Pay up and shut up, or I will withdraw my offer." The debt owed to Hamilton for a casualty fee was, in pre-decimalisation money, 1s 7d—or 8.5p in modern currency. Hamilton was trying to intimidate that old man to pay him £9,000 to buy the casualty that he owned on the house. When Mr. Malone passes on, there will be no casualty fee due because the house will pass to his son. When Hamilton agreed during our meeting to drop his demand against Mr. Malone, it may have been influenced by the fact that he was going to get nothing this side of 20 years anyway, although he still owns the casualty for the property. I could cite many more examples but I shall give only a few because of the constraints of time.

Mrs. Anne Judge, a young widow recently bereaved, had her bank account frozen by Hamilton. Bailiffs and sheriffs were sent round to value her property for warrant sales. Her lawyer behaved less than honourably too, by running up further legal bills when he knew that he and/or his firm had failed Mr. and Mrs. Judge by not properly advising her and her then husband of their liabilities when they bought the property. When Hamilton froze their bank account, he had the neck to telephone her to say that he had to do it so that she would push her lawyer into a quick settlement. That young woman had been widowed for only five months and Hamilton had no regard for her well-being. He was driven by greed for money.

In another case, a young couple, Fiona and Hunter Fairley, bought their home as an investment with a view to renovating and improving it. Like Mrs. Judge, Mr. and Mrs. Fairley were not served well by their lawyer, Mr. Scanlon, and subsequently had to sue him. Mr. and Mrs. Fairley were devastated by their experience and put

[Mr. Jimmy Hood]

it down on paper for me to consider before speaking in this debate. What the House is about to hear is not an isolated case—indeed, far from it. Their experience is nearer the norm when evaluating Mr. Hamilton's activities and behaviour.

The couple wrote:

"October 1994

I was contacted by Mr. Hamilton concerning the feu on our 999 year lease. I immediately contacted our solicitor at the time (Mr. Scanlon). He said he would retrieve our title deeds to review them.

Mr. Hamilton phoned again, explained about the feu and pointed out that it had not been paid for a number of years. As we now owned the property it fell on us to pay for previous owners. At the time Mr. Hamilton seemed friendly. We thought he was working on behalf of the current landlord. We readily accepted any advice he gave us. As he put it he was just doing his job.

Mr. Scanlon didn't seem to be bothered about the feu. He thought it would be thrown out of court as it was an old law.

. . . Mr. Hamilton seemed to think that Mr. Scanlon would pass it on to his insurers to pay, as he had not seen the clause in the title of deeds before we bought the house. We thought it best to leave it in the hand of our solicitor as he knew about these things.

Mr. Hamilton phoned regularly until the end of February to find what was happening as seemingly he couldn't get in contact with Mr. Scanlon.

February. We received a summons to attend a court hearing on behalf of Mr. Hamilton. We contacted our solicitor again. He said he would get a stay of action until we could prepare a case to defend ourselves.

March 20th. After phoning Mr. Scanlon repeatedly over the last couple of weeks I eventually got to speak to him. He told me that everything was fine and that he would get in contact with me if anything happened.

March 28th. Mr. Hamilton contacted me to say that we were supposed to have been in court on March 14th and that Mr. Scanlon sent another solicitor to court to say that Mr. Scanlon had resigned from our case.

The court ruled in favour of Mr. Hamilton.

. . . December. Mr. Hamilton threatened us with sheriff officers. It has been difficult to further the case as Mr. Scanlon is keeping some of our case notes from us.

Our new solicitor has written repeatedly asking for the remainder of our file, but Mr. Scanlon is ignoring them.

Our solicitor wrote to the Law Society complaining about Mr. Scanlon. I also phoned them.

Knock at door. Two men hand me a writ. It said if we don't pay Mr. Hamilton the money that we owe him, sheriff officers will come into our house and value our possessions for sale. Our solicitor contacted Mr. Hamilton's solicitor to ask what was going on. Mr. Hamilton had agreed to wait for his money until we could sue Mr. Scanlon.

Two days later I got another phone call from Mr. Hamilton. I asked him what he was playing at sending sheriff officers with a writ after he had said he would wait for his money. He replied that he didn't think our soliicitor was keeping on the ball and this was just to scare us so as we would get the ball rolling. I explained that it was Mr. Scanlon who was holding it up.

A week before Christmas, took some of our possessions out of our house in case the sheriff officers came back. Was scared in case they took the kids' presents.

January. Keep getting phone calls from Mr. Hamilton. He keeps hassling us. Informed our solicitor to write to Mr. Hamilton's solicitor to tell him to stop hassling us and to get in contact through my solicitor and not phone me.

May. The Sun Alliance (Mr. Scanlon's insurers) got in touch with Mr. Hamilton to sort out the mess. They have agreed on a sum for the feu and are trying to agree a sum for buying the casualty clause.

June. Mr. Hamilton is still hassling us. He called to inform me that the insurance company might get in touch to offer us a sum of money if we don't claim anything else after they pay the feu to Mr. Hamilton. He said it would be in our own interest if we refused it as they would approach him with a better sum. I refused and said I'd think about it. He then told me that if I accepted the money that they offered then I would still have the clause on the house and if we passed the house to the boys in years to come he would still get his money.

Phoned solicitor to write to Mr. Hamilton's solicitor again telling him to stop phoning us.

July. At last! Solicitor asked to see us to sign the papers confirming Sun Alliance had paid Mr. Hamilton.

Now we don't have this hanging over our heads any more. Sun Alliance also wanted us to sign a letter stating that we won't be making any further claims against Mr. Scanlon. We refused. We are awaiting word from our solicitor on whether the Law Society will reprimand Mr. Scanlon."

Those are not the actions of a decent person who was only taking advantage of the law.

Before coming to my conclusions, I want to alert hon. Members to another problem that could potentially devastate private home owners in Scotland—superiorities. Do hon. Members have superiors over their homes?

I recently met a constituent who has given me permission to mention his case here tonight—Mr. Maurice Benyon of 12 South avenue, Carluke. Mr. Benyon lives on what he describes as a Barratt estate in Carluke. He bought a house from Barratt and had extra land where he wanted to build another building. He applied for planning permission but was told by Barratt or its agents that they were the superior of the estate and that he would have to pay them £5,000 for permission to build. The superior can also charge for significant alterations to homes or extensions. The potential for panic and damage to the housing market is overwhelming. That is why this outdated law has to be changed.

I want to draw my remarks to a close. I apologise for the time that I have taken, but I hope that hon. Members agree that the people's stories had to be told. I hope that I have done that tonight.

Mr. Hamilton challenged me to name any individuals who have had to pay him money directly. I can answer his challenge tonight.

The masonic hall in our area paid Mr. Hamilton £6,300; it was not the insurers. The local hairdresser's shop paid him £1,150; it was not the insurers. A plant hire shop paid him £255; it was not the insurers. Mrs. Judge, a recent widow, and Mr. and Mrs. Arlott are still being drawn through the courts, defending themselves from demands for many thousands of pounds.

Mr. Hamilton has sought to portray himself as a man who is only exploiting a bad law, and he says that only lawyers get hurt. The media, while being been critical of him, have assisted in fostering that perception. I met the man and I have seen what he has done to good, decent people, from an 82-year-old pensioner to a recently widowed woman, and many others.

Mr. Hamilton is not just a land speculator. He is an evil, twisted man. He invades people's lives and seeks to destroy them on the altar of making money from a bad law. When I met him, I had the impression that he probably had a very unhappy childhood. He is so

embittered. His hatred for Mr. and Mrs. Reid, whom he had never met, but whom he sought to destroy, was sickening to see.

I say to the Hamiltons of this land, "When you seek to deprive people of their dignity, you expose your own lack of it." I say to the Hamiltons of this land, "When you attack and abuse my people, as you did the people of Boghead, you are awakening a determination in me to rid Scotland of your like—the raiders of lost morals." I say to the Minister tonight, "Get off your backside and get the Scottish land laws reformed and modernised to take us into the new millennium without the feudal entrails of the worst moments of our history."

I cannot help but reflect on the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) last Wednesday. He reminded us that the 1979 Labour Government were in the process of changing the Scottish land laws to do we are seeking to do now. The Minister today can do what Labour was prevented from doing in 1979. I invite him to get on with it.

10.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): I first congratulate the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) on securing this Adjournment debate. I thank him for raising again the issue of leasehold casualty payments which, as we have heard in his speech, are causing grave difficulties for some of his constituents.

I understand and appreciate the concerns that the hon. Gentleman has expressed about some of the demands that are being made on his constituents. This matter was touched on briefly in the House last week when, hon. Members will recall, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) secured a debate on land tenure and land ownership in Scotland. On that occasion, I expressed my deep concern for owners of leasehold properties, such as those in Boghead in Lanarkshire, who were being confronted by demands for casualty payments.

However, as I told the House then, although the Government are concerned about the severe distress being caused to some tenants, neither Ministers nor their officials have any powers to intervene in individual cases of dispute. Perhaps it would be helpful if I explained some of the background to the problem.

The problem of casualty payments relates specifically to leasehold property. As hon. Members will be aware, very little land in Scotland is held on leasehold tenure. What there is is concentrated in particular geographical areas, reflecting the practice of a few earlier landlords leasing to private householders instead of feuing. Consequently, a preponderance of titles in a small village may be leasehold whereas few if any residential titles in a large town or city will be. Even in areas where leasehold is common, no new long residential leases can now be created following the passing of the Land Tenure Reform (Scotland) Act 1974.

The incidence of casualty clauses in leasehold titles is a further imponderable, but again they appear to be concentrated in individual estates. A casualty is a payment falling due to a superior or landlord on the happening of events of uncertain date or occurrence. They are usually based on one year's net rental value of the property. Casualties relating to properties held on feudal tenure were progressively abolished by the Feudal Casualties (Scotland) Act 1914. The imposition of leasehold casualties in new leases was prohibited by section 16 of the Land Tenure Reform (Scotland) Act 1974.

The landlord continues, however, to have the right to collect casualties that were imposed on a long lease before that date. Therefore, the problem of casualty payments is restricted to a relatively small number of people with existing leasehold casualty clauses in leasehold titles in specific parts of Scotland.

Clearly, solicitors should advise their clients of the existence of such casualties when acting on their behalf in the purchase of a property that is held under a leasehold, as opposed to a feudal title. As leaseholds, and therefore leasehold casualties, are uncommon except in certain geographical areas such as Lanarkshire and are couched in unfamiliar terms, they can easily be overlooked by solicitors.

Until recently, many if not most landlords did not bother to collect casualty payments. Now, however, some new landlords have acquired leasehold interests with the specific intention of collecting long-neglected payments. Tenants may therefore be confronted by an unexpected demand for a payment. In addition, it is possible that landlords may succeed in an attempt to show that incoming tenants are liable for past unclaimed casualties.

Although we all sympathise with the tenants who have been placed in such a position, and I should like to record my own personal distaste for the methods being employed to extract payment, I must reiterate that leasehold casualty payments remain lawful, legitimate burdens on leasehold property.

The duty falls on solicitors acting for clients intending to purchase leasehold property to identify provisions for leasehold casualties in the title deeds and to warn their clients of the possible consequences. If the solicitor fails in that duty, he lays himself open to a claim for negligence against his professional indemnity insurance.

I understand that the landlord of the properties in Boghead is encouraging tenants to make such negligence claims against solicitors who acted for them in the purchase of their properties as a means of making the casualty payments.

The hon. Gentleman asked for legislation in order to alleviate the problem. It would be ideal if we could wave some legislative wand to solve the problems of the tenants in Boghead and elsewhere. Regrettably, in the real world, there is no easy solution.

Existing leasehold casualties cannot simply be abolished without making provision for compensation for the landlords for loss of future income. To do so would be to contravene the principles of the European Convention on Human Rights. Casualty payments that are already due would be unaffected and would remain payable by the tenant. Therefore, nothing can be done to change the present position of the hon. Gentleman's constituents. Their recourse has to be to their solicitors.

I am aware that others have suggested two possible solutions.

Mr. Hood: Many of my constituents in Boghead will be depressed to hear the Minister's response. It is a tragedy that we are giving in to such people as Hamilton.

[Mr. Hood]

All I have heard is an apology for what has happened in my constituency and I find the Minister's reply truly offensive.

Mr. Robertson: I did not intend to be offensive. I was merely setting out the position and pointing out to the hon. Gentleman why the action that he has requested is, in part, impossible.

Part 1 of the Long Leases (Scotland) Act 1954 allowed tenants to convert leases into feus for a payment in compensation to the landlord. The Act provided that this could be done only during a period of five years after the passing of the Act.

It has been suggested that that legislation should be resurrected. This would not, however, remove the need to provide for compensation to landlords, nor would it do anything to help tenants where casualty payments are already due.

The other possible solution involves the Feudal Casualties (Scotland) Act 1914, which banned the creation of any new feudal casualties after the commencement of the Act, as has since happened for leasehold casualties in the Land Tenure (Scotland) Act 1974. It also set up a system for redemption of old ones within 15 years, either by agreement or upon payment of compensation by the proprietor to the superior to a scale contained in the Act. Redemption other than by agreement did not apply to any casualties that were already due. That meant that if the feudal superior did not agree, the owner had to compensate him for the loss of income.

Section 23 of the 1914 Act states that the Court of Session may provide by Act of Sederunt for the redemption and extinction of

"any rights of the nature substantially of casualties which are not comprised within the scope of this Act"

on terms seeming to the court to be just and equitable on the analogy of the provisions of the Act.

I understand that the possibility of an Act of Sederunt under section 23 to provide for the compulsory redemption and extinction of leasehold as opposed to feudal casualties has been considered. There were, however, concerns both about the vires of the action proposed, particularly given the likelihood of legal challenge from the more commercially minded landlords, and about the resources that the Court of Session would need in order to determine realistic compensation rates for landlords. In any event, the proposal would do nothing to alleviate the immediate problems in Boghead.

A real solution to the problem of leasehold casualties can come only with reform of the law on long leases in general and as part of a package that involves compensation. The Scottish Law Commission is to look at the law on long residential leases as part of the major review of property law that it is at present undertaking. The commission cannot take matters forward until it has completed its present work on the law of the tenement and feudal system.

No one who was present at the Adjournment debate last week can doubt the strength of feeling of honourable Members from both sides of the House over the need to abolish the remaining aspects of the feudal system. As I made clear at that time, the Government are fully committed to doing so as soon as possible once we have received the commission's report.

Reform of the law of the tenement is also very important and will affect many people in Scotland. It has to be right that the commission tackles work in those vital areas first. I understand that the commission hopes to issue its report on the law of the tenement during 1997 and on abolition of the feudal system thereafter. It will, however, require to devote all its property law resources to achieving that: feudalism has survived for nearly 1,000 years and is deeply embedded in the private law of Scotland. It is an immensely complicated area of law. The abolition of one system of land tenure and its replacement with a new system of absolute ownership requires a great deal of consideration and public consultation. Many conflicting points have already been raised and will have to be taken fully into account.

Once the commission's report on the feudal system is delivered it can turn to leasehold tenure. No legislative solution can help the residents of Boghead whose leasehold casualties are already due. Once again, I wish to express my sympathy for their plight and my hope that their individual difficulties may be speedily resolved.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 14 November 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Peace Process

1. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the latest political developments in the peace process. [2509]

5. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress in the multi-party talks in Northern Ireland. [2513]

7. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next expects to meet representatives of all parties in Northern Ireland to discuss the peace process. [2516]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): Having agreed rules of procedure and settled the agenda for the remainder of the opening plenary session, the two Governments and the other talks participants are accordingly now addressing proposals regarding the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons. Sinn Fein continues to exclude itself from those negotiations.

Mr. Winnick: Is it not time that the IRA stopped teasing about a possible ceasefire and reinstated one on a permanent basis? Is there any information that the Secretary of State would like to share with the House on that matter? Should not the public be warned, certainly on the mainland, that the IRA will almost certainly try to commit a terrorist crime, or perhaps more, in the period leading up to Christmas?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: It is not merely time but overdue that the IRA should do what the hon. Gentleman suggests. It is abundantly clear that preparations for further attacks were being undertaken at the time of the ceasefire. It is desirable that Sinn Fein should, on proper terms—on terms equal to those that apply to everyone else—be included in negotiations. However, the position of the Irish Government and ourselves has been made very clear, which, so far as our Parliament is concerned, is incorporated in the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc.) Act 1996.

Mr. McFall: Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating George Mitchell on the excellent work that he has done on the talks, and especially on bringing all the parties together? If President Clinton should award Senator Mitchell high office in the United States, what plans does the Secretary of State have for a new chairman?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am glad to share in the congratulations that the hon. Gentleman rightly considers to be due. We have all been extremely grateful for Senator Mitchell's chairmanship, which we very much admire. We wish him the very best—although that is outside our jurisdiction. Naturally, we also wish the best for ourselves.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Secretary of State realise that one of the problems has been delays by the Government in opening all-party talks after the first IRA ceasefire? Does he agree that, if we are to make progress and achieve all-party talks and another ceasefire, we must at least maintain lines of communication, confidence-building measures and a hope of change in the six counties? Does he agree that all-party talks have no meaning unless all parties—I mean all parties—are around the table as part of the discussions and negotiations?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I certainly do not accept the "foot-dragging" argument, which I hear occasionally, that somehow the British Government are responsible for the abandonment of the ceasefire, in February 1996, because we did not respond to the ceasefire, in August 1994. Nothing could be further from the truth. Sinn Fein was not admitted to the talks because it did not satisfy us—or any reasonable person—that what it meant by its words was what it was prepared to secure by its action—by the things that it did and, just as importantly, by the things that it did not do.

The British Government moved their position on several occasions in an effort to overcome the impasse, and we attracted a great deal of criticism from some quarters for doing so. I believe that the Government's action was right, and that the blame lies in one area, and in one area only, for the abandonment of the ceasefire: that is, with Sinn Fein and the IRA.

Mr. Trimble: Did the Secretary of State read reports of President Clinton's words last weekend, when he said that a ceasefire had to be genuine and permanent? Does the Secretary of State agree with that? Does he agree with the obvious truth, which is clear to everyone in Northern Ireland, that there is not the slightest likelihood that Sinn Fein will meet those requirements, and that there is now a clear need to move on to substantive talks without that? I should tell the Secretary of State that we are deeply frustrated by the Government's unwillingness to move forward on that basis, and that there is considerable and growing unease in Northern Ireland at the Secretary of State's inability to express himself publicly as clearly as President Clinton did.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I would have thought that it was well known from what the Prime Minister said and from what I have said that there has to be a ceasefire that is genuine and permanent, and, what is more, one that is intended to be genuine and permanent. Of course that is right. We have to guard against what one might call a

tactical ceasefire to secure advance which will then be followed by a return to violence, or the threat of a return to violence, if that seems expedient.

The hon. Gentleman asked me whether I think it likely that Sinn Fein will comply with that. I cannot tell whether it is likely—only Sinn Fein knows whether it is likely—but I certainly believe it to be desirable. Whether it is likely or not will depend not on what it says but on what it does. Meanwhile, as we have often made clear, the absence of any one party will not prevent the talks from going ahead. There is a great deal of valuable work to be done by the talks even if one party is absent. Of course, it is much better if all parties elected for the purpose take part, provided that they do so on proper terms.

Mr. Hunter: With regard to the possibility of Sinn Fein re-entering the process, will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that it will require not only the unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire but Sinn Fein establishing a commitment to exclusively peaceful means which will take some time, albeit one which one cannot specify in advance?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I agree with my hon. Friend. He recites the language of paragraph 8 of the ground rules paper referred to in legislation as a Command Paper. After what happened in South Quay, in Manchester and at the Thiepval barracks at Lisburn, as the Prime Minister said, mere words cannot be enough. I am happy enough to adopt language which I think the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) has used in the past, namely that Sinn Fein must commit itself in word and deed to the path of peace and democracy—I stress "and deed".

Mr. Wilkinson: By what mechanism does my right hon. and learned Friend hope to secure in the current talks procedure the physical elimination of terrorist weapons that are currently illegally held?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I cannot secure it but I can facilitate it by legislation that will provide for a scheme to be set up by the Secretary of State, which will enable terrorist weapons to be got rid of permanently and which will secure that in the narrow act of implementing the scheme—by bringing forward weapons for that purpose—people shall be protected from prosecution for offences of possessing unlawful weapons. That is the character of the legislation that we hope to introduce very shortly.

Dr. Hendron: With regard to the on-going peace process in Northern Ireland, I am sure that the Secretary of State will agree that, if taken as a whole, the territory between west and north Belfast is the very epicentre of social and economic deprivation in the north of Ireland. That being so, I ask him once again whether he will encourage the university of Ulster and the thousands of people who live on either side of the peace line by giving the go-ahead for the development of a university campus at Springvale.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I very much agree that the area represented by the hon. Gentleman has far too high a level of deprivation of one kind and another. That is why I am especially glad that only last week the Japanese ambassador opened the new Fujitsu Telecoms (Ireland) factory, which will provide 200 jobs, 100 of which will I think be provided almost straight away. The matter of the Springvale complex is more complex. A number of considerations have to be weighed, not least the effect on the provision of education throughout Northern Ireland and the variations that the university has made to its own proposals and those which it may make in the future.

Mr. Robert McCartney: The Secretary of State referred to the terms of the Command Paper of 16 April: that there should be an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire of 31 August 1994. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that the term "unequivocal" refers to the restoration, not to the ceasefire? Does he also agree that any new ceasefire should be not only complete in nature, but permanent in duration and should be accompanied by tangible evidence of good faith through the immediate handing over of a significant amount of guns and Semtex to evidence that the declaration of the ceasefire was not merely words but credible?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The Government's position on the latter part of the hon. and learned Gentleman's question is based four square on what has come to be called the Mitchell compromise approach, to be found in paragraphs 34 and 35 of the international body's report. The hon. and learned Gentleman is familiar with those paragraphs, so I shall not make my reply unduly long.

I very much agree that it is essential that the words used should be accompanied by external, objective indications that can lead the rest of us to form a well-founded judgment on whether they are intended to mean a permanent, not a tactical, ceasefire. Getting rid of all illegally held terrorist weapons is one of the best possible means by which that can be done. We have to consider all the circumstances, including the words used, what is happening on the ground and what is not happening on the ground.

Mr. Soley: Would an unequivocal ceasefire delivered by the IRA, accompanied by statements similar to those made by the Unionist paramilitary groups, elicit a new response from the British and Irish Governments?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: That would obviously be helpful. I do not want to add to what I have just said to the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney). We have to consider all the circumstances, including the words used, what is happening on the ground and what is not happening on the ground. In other words, one has to form a sensible judgment that is as well founded as it can be, taking account of all the available circumstances.

Mr. Madden: Does the Secretary of State agree that the Home Secretary's decision this week to repatriate further prisoners to the Republic of Ireland will be widely welcomed? In the same spirit of building confidence in the peace process in both communities, will the Secretary of State exercise the utmost compassion in maximising home leave before Christmas and new year?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: It is a well-established principle here and in Northern Ireland that prisoners ought to be able to serve their sentences as near as is practicable to their families, for obvious reasons connected with

rehabilitation, among others. I certainly follow that principle, and I think that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary does as well.

I realise the importance attached to what are sometimes called prisoner issues. I have to take account of all proper interests, in particular the sentences passed by the courts, remembering that they have been passed judicially and are not to be interfered with in any material way by the Executive. That said, I realise that there are always grounds for scrutiny of the conditions under which people serve their sentences. That will continue.

Terrorist Weapons (Decommissioning)

2. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the decommissioning of terrorist weapons in Northern Ireland. [2510]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The possession of terrorist weapons in Northern Ireland is wholly unacceptable. Accordingly, the Government will bring forward legislation of an enabling character to provide the statutory foundation for detailed decommissioning arrangements.

Mrs. Winterton: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is still vital that, before coming to the negotiating table, IRA-Sinn Fein must be required to decommission their illegally held weapons? Does he also agree that it is highly unlikely that they will consent to do so for the simple reason that their power base is maintained by the bullet and the bomb, not the ballot box?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I very much agree with the latter part of my hon. Friend's question. It is of course because of that that we are determined that there shall not be a threat hanging over those at the conference table and represented by one party with friends outside the door holding a pile of Semtex and other armaments, which they threaten to use unless a settlement that is satisfactory to them is reached. That would be an unacceptable threat in any democracy—I remind everyone that Northern Ireland is part of our democracy.

I do not, however, agree with my hon. Friend's remark that there must be a complete surrender or decommissioning of weapons by Sinn Fein before any admission to the negotiating table. Our position is based on what is described in the Mitchell report, at paragraphs 34 and 35, as a compromise: decommissioning should take place during the process of negotiations. In that way mutual confidence will be built up.

Mr. Maginnis: Does the Secretary of State agree that after six months of talks it is intolerable that those of us who sit around the table have merely been offered the gesture of enabling legislation, at some date yet to be determined, leading to the setting up of a disarmament and verification commission? What objection does the Secretary of State have to the Ulster Unionist proposal that those who will form that commission should be identified and brought together as a commission designate and enabled to conduct some of the preparatory work that will be necessary if the process of decommissioning is to begin within the lifetime of this Parliament?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is desirable that there should be legislation enabling such a scheme as quickly as possible, and that the scheme should be set up as quickly as possible. These are not easy matters, as the hon. Gentleman knows. He also knows that a scheme-enabling Bill is well advanced and that it is our intention to introduce it very quickly. He also knows that we are giving careful attention to the proposal that he and his party have made. His purpose in doing so is the same as ours—we want to get on as quickly as possible and to ensure that no time is unnecessarily lost before a commission can effectively be put in place once the legislation is passed.

Rev. William McCrea: Has the Secretary of State been made aware of talks between the Irish Foreign Minister, Dick Spring, and IRA-Sinn Fein in recent days? Does he agree that the real proof of any ceasefire will be the handing up of the illegal guns and Semtex that have brought so much terror and murder to our Province? Does he further agree that the policy of compromise of which he speaks has brought nothing to Northern Ireland but tears, sorrow and mayhem for 25 years?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I do not agree that it is a policy of compromise which has brought to Northern Ireland the misery which the hon. Gentleman describes so well and has experienced himself. What has brought that has been the evil and undemocratic processes and policies of the IRA and of its counterparts on the loyalist side—we must never forget that.

I believe that it is sensible to try to find an accommodation, which is what we shall continue to do. I am not aware of any conversations between the Tanaiste and people in Sinn Fein. What I do say is that I will continue to be prepared to take criticism for seeking an accommodation, provided I do so firmly within the parameters of the policy that Her Majesty's Government have publicly laid down.

Mr. Mallon: Does the Secretary of State agree that the political negotiations and the entire political process should not be made hostage to the decommissioning issue? Does he further agree that the Mitchell report should and can be the only basis on which that matter is resolved? And will he assure the House that the two Governments will do all in their power to ensure that we move into the three-strand negotiations without further delay, further prevarication or further attempts by anyone to rewrite the Mitchell report?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I do not know whether anybody has tried to rewrite the Mitchell report. It would be a difficult task and we certainly do not wish it to be done. We think that the Mitchell compromise approach is the right one. We do not want any obstacle placed in the way of entering the three-stranded discussions, save that there has to be a clear understanding as to how the question of illegally held arms shall be dealt with—illegally held arms held by those who will have issued an unequivocal ceasefire and then sought to be admitted to the talks. That cannot be brushed aside. There may be more than one way of coping with it. If we can find a way by which it can be coped with satisfactorily that will facilitate our entry into the three-stranded substantive process, we shall be very glad to achieve it.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that while one group believes that it can have

its way by using firearms and bombs, others are inevitably led to believe that that is the only mechanism through which they can retaliate? The danger is, of course, that many of the illegal weapons are also used for what can be described only as gangster activity. Such a complex situation makes it right for the Government to insist that no political party should be allowed to address the issue of democracy unless it distances itself completely and irrevocably from weapons.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I agree completely with my hon. Friend.

Ms Mowlam: I welcome the Secretary of State's comments in answer to this question and assure him of the Opposition's support for the legislation that he has proposed. It is crucial and we shall give it fair passage. It would be helpful if he confirmed that his approach to decommissioning will be in line not only with the Mitchell principles but with the joint statement by the British and Irish Governments of 1 October. It would also clarify an answer he gave to an earlier question if he explained the role of the verification committee. That might help answer questions about the timing of multi-party talks moving towards a three-stranded approach. Further information on the verification committee might help the House.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's expression of support for the legislation, the character of which she knows. The two Governments' draft conclusions were put forward exactly as they were expressed and they are intended not to be an end but to be a means to an end. Obviously, we are paying careful attention to the responses that the parties have given and are giving to those conclusions. What we want to do is what I just tried to describe to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon). We want to find a means by which decommissioning can be disposed satisfactorily that will lead us as quickly as possible into discussion on the three strands—the substantive discussions. We will continue to try to offer ways forward and continue to listen to the responses that are made.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Have not all law-abiding citizens throughout the UK the right to expect that no party will be admitted to substantive talks without first repudiating unequivocally the use of force and the possession of weapons?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Effectively, yes. All parties have to sign up, if they are to proceed with negotiations, to the Mitchell principles, which include precisely what my hon. Friend has said. That is axiomatic, really, in any democracy. The technical position is that Sinn Fein cannot come in until there has been an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire of August 1994. As I and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister have made clear on many an occasion, in the light of events this year, there has to be more than words. There has to be, in the language used by the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), a commitment to the path of peace.

Rathlin Island Ferry

3. **Miss Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on compensation arrangements for those who lose their jobs as a result of the new ferry introduced between Rathlin island and Ballycastle. [2511]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Malcolm Moss): The forthcoming introduction of a new ferry service will mean the withdrawal of subsidy from the existing operators. As a result they are most unlikely to continue with a ferry service and they have no entitlement to compensation for that eventuality. Should any employee of either operator not be offered employment by the provider of the new service, that employee is at liberty to seek compensation from that provider under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981.

Miss Hoey: I thank the Minister, but surely he must accept that there is a moral responsibility to ensure that those people living on the island who will lose their jobs as a direct result of the introduction of the ferry are compensated. Tommy Cecil runs the Iona ferry, his family have run the ferry for more than 100 years and he has kept the link going between Ballycastle and Rathlin when no money had been spent on the harbours and the crossing was dangerous and attracted no subsidy. Is the Minister really saying that we will throw those people on the scrap heap and not allow them compensation?

Mr. Moss: The Government's purpose is to provide a safer, more reliable and more comfortable ferry service. We are spending, with our European neighbours, around £7.25 million to improve the harbours. We have paid in subsidy around £300,000 to the operators since 1991 and we hope that when the new ferry service is brought in, six new full-time jobs will be created, all of which will go to the islanders. That will bring in £80,000 of permanent employment to Rathlin island.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am sure that the Minister is aware that Rathlin island is the only large island off Northern Ireland that is inhabited. In 1900, it had more than 1,000 inhabitants and that figure has now been reduced to 200. I am sure that he is also aware that never, in all the time up until 1991, did the Government do anything to facilitate the Rathlin islanders getting to Ballycastle and back. They did that on their own initiative. Does the Minister agree that Mr. Cecil should be congratulated on how hard he tried, and managed, to keep a passageway open from the island to Ballycastle? He sacrificed much—lives have been lost on that passage and we should keep that in mind—and he did so willingly and gladly. Mr. Cecil will lose his employment and there will not be jobs for everybody who was employed. Does not the Minister feel that he has an obligation, having taken away—through a large subsidy—that man's right to run that passageway, to do the decent and morally right thing and give him adequate compensation?

Mr. Moss: There are two operators operating the current ferry from Rathlin to Ballycastle and Mr. Cecil is only one of them. He is the only person asking for

compensation. The new contract for the new ferry requires the vessel to be stationed overnight at Rathlin island and that means that all the new jobs will go to Rathlin island people.

Docks and Harbours

4. **Sir James Molyneaux:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will review his proposals for the valuation and rating of docks and harbours in Northern Ireland. [2512]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): It is necessary to revise the current provisions relating to docks and harbours in Northern Ireland in order to bring the rateable values of these undertakings into line with real current values and to maintain relativity with all other property included in the revaluation.

Sir James Molyneaux: Will the Minister consider delaying the imposition of the new rates in Northern Ireland until he has received the conclusions of the pilot studies here in Great Britain and thus avoid variations in the rates between one part of the United Kingdom and another? Will the right hon. Gentleman consent to study some papers that I have in my possession?

Sir John Wheeler: I shall be delighted to consider and study the papers that the right hon. Gentleman has. Indeed, I look forward to seeing them. The matters discussed in Great Britain are not relevant to the revaluation of ports in Northern Ireland at this point in time, but I shall be glad to consider the information that he has and see what bearing it has on the proposals being considered for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Will my right hon. Friend make available to the House an assessment of the impact of the valuation on the improved harbour at Church bay, on Rathlin island, and on the improvements in Ballycastle? Will he consider adding to the kindness of his colleague the Under-Secretary of State, who met a deputation led by the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley), to discuss the future of those who have been running the ferry between the two harbours, and see whether Richard Green, Tommy Cecil and others can have the opportunity of gaining personally from their service in the past, rather than losing out when a big subsidy goes in?

Sir John Wheeler: I am glad to tell my hon. Friend that the Under–Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for North–East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss), will meet the people whom he mentioned later this afternoon, so the discussion will take place within a matter of hours.

Transport Links

6. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with Commissioner Kinnock about transport links between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. [2515]

Mr. Moss: None.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the Minister confirm that the Stranraer to Larne route is vital and is part of the trans-European network designated by the Commission? Will he join his colleague the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), and travel from Belfast to the right hon. Gentleman's ancestral home? If he did, he would find two bottlenecks, one at Girvan and one at Maybole. That would be especially true this afternoon as the heavy lorries will be joined by the buses carrying Celtic and Rangers supporters to the match in Glasgow. After that, will the hon. Gentleman stop off in Edinburgh and tell the Secretary of State for Scotland that it is far beyond time for Girvan and Maybole to have the bypasses that they deserve?

Mr. Moss: I shall be happy to accept the hon. Gentleman's invitation to visit his constituency, and to pass on his comments to the Scottish Office Minister with whom those responsibilities lie.

Mr. Beggs: Does the Minister accept that if we are to maximise the use of the ferry services between Northern Ireland, Scotland and England, we must have good-quality approach roads and cross-city links to our ports in the Province? Will he undertake that when discussing the trans-European networks with the Commissioner, he will seek to maximise support for the upgrading of those roads? Can he tell us today when we shall see the completion of the A26 and the west link, and when and if he will advance the start date for dualling the A8 between Corr's corner and Larne, and for improving the A2 from Belfast to Carrickfergus?

Mr. Moss: I am happy to confirm that the next stage of the A26 dualling is to start virtually in the next week or so. The A8 Belfast to Larne road is a priority road for us. It is also a trans-European network project, as agreed at the December 1994 European Council in Essen. It is in our 15-year programme to improve the A8, and I take on board the hon. Gentleman's comments about the importance of our main roads to the ports in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Dowd: As we are talking about the vital transport links between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, has the Minister seen the press reports suggesting that the future of the British Airways service between Heathrow and Belfast may be jeopardised by conditions attached to the proposed alliance between BA and American Airlines? Is he also aware that in a letter to me, although denying such an overt threat, the chief executive of BA refused to guarantee the future of that vital service? What steps is the Minister taking to make it plain to BA and to his colleagues at the Department of Transport that whatever the merits of the proposed alliance with American Airlines, the future of one of the principal links between Great Britain and Northern Ireland must not be compromised?

Mr. Moss: The hon. Gentleman raises an extremely important matter. I give him an assurance that members of my Department will discuss those issues at the appropriate level with British Airways.

Crimes (Clear-up Rate)

8. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the clear–up rate for recorded crimes in each of the last five years. [2517]

Sir John Wheeler: The clear-up rates for total recorded crime in Northern Ireland during the 1991-95 period were: 1991—36 per cent., 1992—34 per cent., 1993—36 per cent., 1994—36 per cent., 1995—36 per cent.

Mr. Cunningham: Can the Minister say when we shall get some action on the White Paper on policing in Northern Ireland?

Sir John Wheeler: The White Paper on policing in Northern Ireland has been published. I should very much like legislation to be introduced at the earliest opportunity to implement the ideas in that White Paper, but that depends on legislative time being available.

Rev. Martin Smyth: While sharing concern that the clear-up rate for recorded crime is just about a third, does the Minister share my concern about continuing unrecorded crime? Specifically, is he concerned about organised boycott of traders? Is he concerned about those who have regularly blocked legal parades, even when such parades have been declared so in courts of law?

Sir John Wheeler: Of course it is true that recorded crime represents only that crime which is reported to the police, and there is always an unreported amount of crime which is not recorded but which is taken into account. Yes, I am very concerned about the issues that the hon. Gentleman mentions. All illegal acts of any kind in Northern Ireland are to be deplored, and it is the duty of the police and the courts to uphold the rule of law.

Mr. Worthington: Further to what my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South–East (Mr. Cunningham) said, to improve the crime figures it is important that we maintain the momentum regarding the police. The White Paper on the police was much delayed and now seems to have disappeared without trace—it is not in the legislative programme. We were promised a fundamental review of the police under the new Chief Constable, Mr. Flanagan. That was promised in the summer, but it has not yet been published. Is it not important, in the Government's view, that we maintain the momentum on the police, linked with crime figures and everything else to do with law and order in Northern Ireland?

Sir John Wheeler: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. Of course we should continue to propose ideas for the more effective and efficient management of the police system in Northern Ireland. The hon. Gentleman will understand, however, as will the House, that the fact that the Provisional IRA ended its ceasefire on 9 February 1996 has significantly changed the review of the resources of the Royal Ulster Constabulary because we are back in the business of protecting lives and property from terrorist attack. Nevertheless, ideas continue to be developed and will be implemented.

Employment

11. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures he proposes to increase employment in Northern Ireland over the next 12 months. [2521]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Michael Ancram): The Government's strategy is to create an economic environment in which business can prosper, to help local firms become more competitive in world markets, to promote enterprise, and to attract tourists and high-quality international investment projects. This approach has delivered record levels of employment in Northern Ireland; we shall continue with it.

Mr. Mackinlay: That is all very interesting, but it is not good enough. Does the Minister not reflect that the one thing that unites Protestant unemployed and Catholic unemployed is the fact that they are unemployed? Will he explain to us why the Government are acquiescing in a situation where there are twice as many long-term unemployed people in Northern Ireland as in the rest of the United Kingdom? What is to be done about that?

Did the Minister note that the prospective Tory candidate for Tunbridge Wells expects Labour to win the next general election? Is he aware that the unemployed of Northern Ireland hope that he is correct, so that my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) can intervene on behalf of the unemployed in Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman is entitled to dream as much as he likes, but he should read what is going on in Northern Ireland. Had he done so yesterday, he might have been more cautious in what he has just said. The unemployment figures announced yesterday show a headline reduction of more than 8,000 and a seasonally adjusted reduction of 3,300, and constitute the lowest level for 15 years. In addition, there are 573,090 people in employment—the highest June figure on record. The hon. Gentleman really does not know what he is talking about.

Mr. William Ross: Is the Minister aware that we are interested not only in creating new employment, but in preserving existing employment? Is he further aware that a delegation from Gallaher is visiting the House today to point out the severe effect that the high level of taxation on tobacco has had on the production of cigarettes and tobacco in Northern Ireland? Although I do not smoke myself, I am concerned about employment in that industry. Given that so much of the product is immediately smuggled back for resale—with a consequent loss to the Exchequer—will the Chancellor of the Exchequer also take note of my question?

Mr. Ancram: I had some difficulty in hearing all of the hon. Gentleman's question, but if I heard him correctly, his concerns are shared by others. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is in his place, and I am sure that he listened to the hon. Gentleman.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 November. [2539]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the drop of more than 40,000 in the latest monthly unemployment count—which, I understand, is the largest monthly decrease for two years—illustrates yet again the success of the Government's policies in promoting job creation? Does he agree that if United Kingdom employers had additional costs inflicted on them by the EU, that would put in jeopardy the downward trend in unemployment in our country, which has been going on for three years and stands in stark contrast with many other EU countries?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right, both about the welcome trend in unemployment and about the fact that unemployment is falling here in a way that cannot be seen anywhere else in the continent of Europe. That is not unrelated to the fact that we have avoided the burdens on business that so many of our partners have accepted. Of course, those burdens would have been accepted by the Opposition.

Mr. Blair: Does the Prime Minister agree that today's inflation rise, together with the sharp rise in long-term interest rates, should set the warning lights flashing? How does he square that with the promise that he made just a few months ago that he would meet his inflation target by the end of this year?

The Prime Minister: I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman is mistaken. I know that the retail prices index figures are complex, but I think that he has failed to understand the impact of this morning's figures. I will explain to him what has happened, and he can then explain it to his Back Benchers. The figures are calculated year on year, and there was a quite exceptional one-month fall last October. That means that the 12-month year-on-year figure looks artificially high. I can reassure the right hon. Gentleman that that will correct itself over the months ahead and that we expect to meet our target.

Mr. Blair: I do not think that we have ever heard a more ridiculous excuse for a rise in inflation figures. If the inflation figures were so good, why did interest rates have to go up? They went up because of the worry about inflation. Have we not heard it all before? We heard it all before the previous election and we heard it all before 1987, when the Government said that an economic miracle was under way. Will the Prime Minister answer these specific questions? On interest rates and inflation, will he confirm that Britain is now 11th out of 15 in Europe? Do any of our main competitors outside Europe have as high interest rates or inflation as Britain?

The Prime Minister: I begin to suspect that the right hon. Gentleman truly does not understand; he is not being perverse—he genuinely does not understand. I will explain the position to him gently and easily. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor raised interest rates to prevent inflation from rising, not as a result of existing inflation. To hear lectures on inflation from the right hon. Gentleman, when the lowest inflation achieved by his party in government was 7.5 per cent. and millions remember when it was 27 per cent., and when the inflation figure today is a statistical aberration because of a dramatic fall last year, only illustrates the fact that the Labour party is totally incapable not only of running the economy but even of understanding it.

Mr. Blair *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Blair: The House will have noticed that the Prime Minister did not dispute that we were 11th out of 15 for interest rates and inflation. If he disputes it, let him come to the Dispatch Box and say that the figure is wrong. The House will listen to him when he rises to his feet and tells us that 11th out of 15 is wrong. The simple fact, as on every other matter, is that when he said that he would cut taxes, he raised them, when he said—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members do not like this because it is the truth. [HON. MEMBERS: "More."] They want more, so let us give them more—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. This barracking must stop. Other hon. Members have questions on the Order Paper and I want to call them.

Mr. Blair: Let the Prime Minister dispute any of the following facts. He said before the general election that he would cut tax, and he raised it. Does he dispute that? He said that he would eliminate public borrowing, and he doubled public sector debt. Does he dispute that? He said that he would lick inflation, and it has risen. Does he dispute that? If he does not dispute any of those facts, or the fact that we are 11th out of 15 for interest rates and inflation, why should anyone believe a word that he says on the economy?

The Prime Minister: I had fondly suspected today that the right hon. Gentleman might have broken with tradition and mentioned the fall in unemployment, which his party is supposed to care about—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I will tell the right hon. Gentleman that the October inflation figures were the fourth best that we have known in October since the war. It is ridiculous for him to talk to us about taxation and to proceed as he did today, when the deputy leader of his party has said that Labour

"shouldn't follow the Government down the road of cutting the basic rate of tax"

and that under Labour there would certainly be higher tax. I see hon. Members nodding in agreement. The right hon. Gentleman criticises us about tax while his party advocates higher tax. He cannot stomach the fact that the British economy is in better shape than any Labour Government have ever achieved and that he could not

match the condition that it is in. He will do everything that he can to pursue grievance politics and damage the British economy in his own interest.

Q2. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 November. [2540]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Booth: Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that at the European intergovernmental conference he will block any proposal further to erode our right of veto? Is he fully aware that signing the social chapter is not only expensive in itself but would render Britain powerless to avoid becoming uncompetitive as Europe introduces more and more imposts? The Labour party will never understand that, which is one of the reasons why we shall win the next general election.

The Prime Minister: I can certainly and willingly give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. The social chapter is a pipeline bulging with potential new burdens on business, all of which would cost jobs in the United Kingdom. As an illustration of the damage that a Labour Government would undoubtedly do, perhaps at some stage today the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) would like to condemn the Labour Member of the European Parliament for Durham, who called on the Commission to take action against the United Kingdom including

"seeking unlimited fines against the UK Government".

I want to know whether that is Labour policy or whether the right hon. Gentleman will disown him.

Mr. Ashdown: Did the Prime Minister see the warning from Coopers and Lybrand yesterday that if we continue as we have so far the Government will be technically bankrupt by the end of next year? *[Interruption.]* That is what it said. The Prime Minister obviously has not read it. Let me put it to him like this: if a council had done what the Government have done and doubled its debt in six years, doubled the level of borrowing to which it had said that it would adhere two years ago and then, to win an election next year, cut its taxes to make things worse, would he regard that as responsible?

The Prime Minister: What the right hon. Gentleman said about the nation being bankrupt is just bizarre—it is just off the wall. If this is a bankrupt nation, why are all those overseas nations and overseas investors, both in Europe and beyond, investing in what he says is a bankrupt nation? I suggest that he looks at what is going on in Britain and stops taking advice from his economic advisers, who clearly know nothing about everything.

Mr. Whittingdale: Is my right hon. Friend aware that this week marks the first anniversary of the death of my constituent, Leah Betts, who died as a result of taking a single Ecstasy tablet? Will he join me in paying tribute to Leah's parents, who have worked tirelessly to ensure that other young people learn the lesson of Leah's death? Will he confirm that the Government will give every support to the Bill to be introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg), which will ensure that night clubs whose managers do not take proper action to stop drug trading will be swiftly and permanently closed?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that matter. I met Mr. and Mrs. Betts some time ago and I think that the whole country remembers the tragedy that they had to endure and the courage with which they endured it. I certainly undertake to do all that I can to curb the menace of drugs and I will look most carefully at the private Member's Bill that is to be introduced. If it is at all possible to give full support to that Bill, as I anticipate that it will be, then we shall certainly do so.

Q3. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 November. [2541]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Pike: The Prime Minister will accept that there is still a major crisis over bovine spongiform encephalopathy. Does he accept that there has been enough dithering over the introduction of the selective cull scheme that was agreed at Florence? Will he give us a date for implementation of the scheme and say when we shall start to see an end to the problem?

The Prime Minister: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was here yesterday or, indeed, when I answered those questions from the right hon. Member for Sedgefield. Since the hon. Gentleman is asking precisely the same question, I am tempted to refer him to the answer I gave some time ago. The reality is that we are pursuing with the Commission proposals for relaxing the ban on the United Kingdom and the export restrictions on animals from certified herds and on those that are qualified under the beef assurance scheme. Those discussions are going on at the moment.

Q4. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 November. [2543]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Robathan: The whole House will welcome the Government's decision in principle to support international action to prevent humanitarian catastrophe in central Africa. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that if British troops are sent to Zaire they will go with carefully considered and clear objectives, very precise instructions and a properly determined chain of command?

The Prime Minister: I suspect that I speak for the whole House in expressing extreme concern at the situation in eastern Zaire. I believe that everyone is acutely conscious of the refugees' plight and of the literally hundreds upon hundreds of thousands of people who will undoubtedly face death in the next few weeks unless urgent action is taken.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will be making a statement in a few moments. I believe that if western Governments have the capacity to help,

there is a strong moral obligation upon us to help. We have considered very carefully how we can best provide that help and in principle we are prepared to provide troops for a multinational force.

I have to say to the House, however, that the situation on the ground is complex and difficult, the terrain is tough, there is inadequate infrastructure and at this stage there is no clear ceasefire. So before sending British troops, or deciding upon the precise numbers, we need to be absolutely clear about what they are being asked to do in detail and the conditions in which they will operate. We also need to look very carefully at the particular circumstances that they will face. A reconnaissance team will be travelling to the region today to do that, and I hope that we shall be able to reach a firm decision before too long as to what troops are to go.

Q5. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 November. [2545]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I enter a last-minute plea that the Prime Minister reconsider his decision about a free vote for Conservative Members of Parliament next week on the banning of guns? Why cannot those hon. Members be allowed to exercise their own consciences and decide for themselves how to vote on an issue that the public regard as extremely important?

The Prime Minister: We ought not to forget precisely what the legislation is about: the controls that we place on legally held firearms and the right of law-abiding citizens to use them responsibly. That seems to be a matter on which it is right for the Government to take a decision, as the House expected before the Cullen report was presented to it, and we have done so. Firearms legislation has not traditionally been considered on a free vote in the House and we are not inviting the House to do so on this occasion.

Zaire

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Portillo): With permission, Madam Speaker, I would like to make a statement about Zaire.

The Great Lakes region of Africa is facing a complex emergency and a potential humanitarian catastrophe. Throughout this century, violent clashes have occurred periodically between local tribes and Tutsis of Rwandan origin who have lived in Zaire for generations, who are known as Banyamulenge. Those tensions have been aggravated by the arrival in Zaire of more than 1.2 million refugees fleeing conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi.

Despite efforts by the international community, and the Government of Zaire, those refugees have been unwilling to return to Rwanda. The presence among them of up to 50,000 armed militia has been a destabilising factor in the region. Violence flared earlier this year, when Tutsi and other groups were attacked by armed Hutu militia, who are known as Interahamwe and who carried out the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and also by elements of the Zairean army.

The current crisis was precipitated by Zaire's decision to withdraw citizenship from the Banyamulenge, and its threat to expel them from Zaire. The Banyamulenge retaliated by counter-attacking in areas close to the borders with Rwanda and Burundi, and they captured the main towns in Kivu province. Zaire has portrayed the conflict as an invasion by Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda. Rwanda says that all its troops that had been supporting the rebels have now withdrawn.

During the past 24 hours, fighting in the region is reported to have intensified. One thing at least is clear: if no action is taken, we could be facing a huge humanitarian tragedy. The United Nations has estimated that the death toll could rise in the next week to between 10,000 and 20,000 a day.

More than 800,000 refugees are reported to have left their camps, and 250,000 Zaireans have also left their homes. The UN Secretary-General's humanitarian co-ordinator is leading the humanitarian effort, and the UN Secretary-General is drawing up urgent plans for a humanitarian task force and planning an international conference to address the political causes of the conflict. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees organisation is struggling to distribute what aid it can. Our own Overseas Development Agency has done an excellent job and is in close contact with UN agencies and non-governmental organisations but, without help, the agencies will not be able to avert the impending disaster.

On 9 November, the UN Security Council passed a resolution calling for nations to plan for a multinational force to protect humanitarian relief and to promote refugee repatriation. Repatriation must feature in any lasting solution to the crisis. Because of the complexity and urgency of the task, the United Nations is looking to western nations to provide forces in the first instance.

Britain has been actively involved in contingency planning since last Friday. Canada has now emerged as the lead nation for a multinational force, and the United States, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Britain among western nations have indicated a willingness to participate. We understand that a number of African countries are also potential troop contributors: South Africa, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Gambia, Tunisia, Kenya, Botswana, Ethiopia, Mali and Chad.

A statement from Washington last night made clear the United States' views on the key points relating to the mission. First, there is a need to assess fully the threat before deploying, and also a need to have the consent of the Governments of the nations in the area.

Secondly, the mission should be to facilitate the delivery of aid by civilian relief agencies and to allow the voluntary repatriation of refugees by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. The mission would not include disarming the militias or policing the refugee camps.

Thirdly, the force will operate under chapter 7 rules of the UN charter, which permit an active enforcement role. It would not be a blue-hatted operation.

Fourthly, the participants would bear their own costs, and additional arrangements would need to be made to support participation by African nations, but non-troop-contributing countries which can afford it should also help to bear the costs.

Fifthly, the humanitarian mission should be of short duration—about four months. The exit strategy would then be to transfer responsibility for a more stable situation to other nations, whose task would be to ensure that the conditions of today did not recur.

Sixthly, the United States has made it clear that it would wish its involvement to be around Goma airfield, in establishing an air bridge to the region and providing a security corridor from Goma to the Rwandan border.

Those principles provide a good starting point for us to develop a full plan before the time our forces could deploy. Senior British military planners are in New York today working to develop joint thinking between the allies.

There are important additional questions to be settled. First, of course, is what level of force might be required were our entry into Zaire to be opposed, and how many would be needed to enable relief to reach those furthest scattered refugees. We need to settle detailed objectives flowing from the broad principles spelled out in Washington. In particular, we will need to agree critical matters such as the rules of engagement.

No British forces will be sent unless the Government are satisfied that the objectives are clear and attainable; that the prospects of handing on to a follow-on force are good; that command and control is clear; and that British forces are sufficient and well enough armed to protect themselves and to save lives.

Complex as those issues are, we must prepare ourselves now for action, since the urgency is great. I have authorised a small number of reconnaissance troops to travel to the area to assess the conditions that British forces would face. I have shortened the notice to move of certain units centred on the joint rapid deployment force.

The House will rightly ask why Britain should become involved in a place far from our country and where no vital national interest is engaged. It is because we are a civilised nation. We can that see people are about to die in their thousands, and we are one of the few nations on earth that has the military capability to help at least some of them. We recognise our humanitarian obligations. We take pride in our permanent membership of the

United Nations Security Council, but it carries with it clear duties. Some of our leading allies in NATO are willing to assist, and our place is with them.

Britain often faces such calls to action. I believe that we should respond out of our deep concern for our fellow man and with a sense of pride that Britain's armed forces can make a difference.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): The whole House is shocked by the extent and the horror of the humanitarian suffering in the Great Lakes region of Africa, which we have seen on our television screens. The international community simply could not stand idly by; rightly, it has been moved to act to alleviate that suffering. When the United Nations proposed the use of military force to try to facilitate the aid effort, it was appropriate that Britain should offer to play her part. Our troops are well trained and highly respected and they will acquit themselves very professionally. I know that all hon. Members wish them well in their very difficult task. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

It is a very risky venture, and we must ensure that we minimise the risk to our armed forces. Can the Secretary of State assure the House not only that will there be a clear mission objective but that there will be no mission drift such as we saw in Somalia? Will he assure the House also that contingency plans for an exit strategy are being worked upon in case that is needed? Is the Secretary of State certain that we have learnt the lessons of Bosnia and that sufficient troops will be made available and sent, with robust rules of engagement and the equipment to defend themselves?

Can the Secretary of State give the House a rough idea of how many British troops may be sent collectively to the region and what type of troops they will be? Is he thinking of front-line troops, paratroopers, the Marines or mainly support services?

The Secretary of State listed some very sensible proposals outlined by the United States Administration, and I press him for the Government's views on them. Do we basically endorse the American notion of the mission? In particular, the Americans' first point is that the operation can be undertaken only if it has the consent of the Governments in the region. Do we have any idea about the current position as to gaining that consent?

Can the Secretary of State be more forthcoming about the command and control of the British troops? I understand that United States troops will be under overall Canadian command but tactically under United States command. Will that be the case with the British troops also?

Although it is early days, can the Secretary of State comment on the length of our commitment? Do we broadly endorse the United States position that it should last about four months? Does he further accept that the mission should be solely twofold: for the delivery of humanitarian aid and to assist the voluntary repatriation of refugees? If so, what is the Government's strategy for dealing with the armed militia, because it holds the key to the return of the refugees? The House expects the Secretary of State to give some idea of the Government's position.

Finally, will the Secretary of State assure the House that, while the military action is being prepared, every effort is being expended on the diplomatic front to reach a political solution? As we all know, the military action can be only the means to the end. I hope that the Government, with our allies in the UN, are working towards that end.

Mr. Portillo: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the support that he has given to the Government and to our armed forces which may be involved in the operation. I thank him also for his constructive questions. I will not necessarily have complete answers to all of them, but I confirm that the mission must have clear objectives. I said that the exit strategy would be to hand over to other nations. I am encouraged that a number of other nations have come forward, particularly from the African continent. We do not yet have a commitment from them to a follow-on force, but their expression of interest is encouraging.

We have all learnt lessons from Bosnia. The talks going on at present in New York involving British military planners are intended to ensure that all the objectives, the rules of engagement and the command and control systems are fully worked out before any British soldiers are committed to the area.

The hon. Gentleman pressed me on numbers. The present indication from each of the other contributing nations from the west is that they will put in the equivalent of about a battalion, with whatever supporting troops are necessary in each case. I therefore imagine that our commitment might be of a similar order, but the most important determinant of the numbers that we would send would be to ensure that they were sufficiently well equipped and armed, and there in sufficient numbers to take care of themselves and to do a good job of saving human life. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and the House will forgive me if I cannot yet deduce an exact figure from all that.

Do we share the United States' notions? By and large we do. Certainly the idea of deploying for about four months before finding a follow-on force fits in closely with us. Canada is to be the lead nation, but the Canadians would be the first to recognise, I think, that, although it is extremely helpful in the troubled circumstances of Africa for Canada to be our lead nation, to provide the command and control it will need a great deal of back-up from the United States, particularly for the equipment and communications that are necessary for such an operation.

The hon. Gentleman touches on a critical factor which needs to be discussed further—I must be frank with him and with the House. The critical factor is that the US wishes to limit the mission to the delivery of humanitarian aid. The hon. Gentleman has identified a broader ambition to disarm the militias, which would help with the repatriation of refugees.

I believe that we would be wise to think carefully about this issue before taking a position. Clearly, the nations must take a collective position. To say that we will disarm the militias is to undertake a much more complex and dangerous military operation. While I stand by what I said in my statement—that repatriation of the refugees must form part of the long-term process—it is highly debatable whether we should include that now in the short-term mission. The US has indicated its view that the short-term mission should be limited to humanitarian aid.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Does my right hon. Friend sense, as I do, a general recognition in the House

[Mr. Tom King]

that the scale of the impending possible catastrophe is such as to justify the announcement that he has made today? Does he agree that the announcement is a grave one, and that it has fallen to him, as Secretary of State for Defence, to commit our forces to an extremely dangerous situation? The operation could not be undertaken in such dangerous circumstances unless it was done in an extremely professional way, and the only organisation capable of undertaking it effectively is NATO. On that basis, it can be supported.

The operation will have to be of sufficient size to meet an extremely uncertain situation. Clearly, there will be concerns about the time frame that my right hon. Friend has outlined, and about whether the withdrawal date will be achievable—we were disappointed in the case of Bosnia.

My right hon. Friend read out very fast the names of all the countries that will support us. Does he not draw comfort when he recalls how many of those countries we have worked and trained with in Africa? I hope that the forces from Africa that were trained by British training teams will be able to make their contribution to this vital humanitarian task.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend makes a number of very important points, including our very strong links with some of the countries that we would like to be part of the force taking on the burden of the operation as a follow-on force. I repeat that I have been encouraged by their expressions of interest so far.

I very much welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend supports this decision, with all the dangers that it entails, and that he recognises that the scale of the impending catastrophe justifies it.

Let me make one thing clear. Although we will be deploying with NATO allies, which is an important factor in all of this, this is not envisaged as a NATO operation. Were it to be a NATO operation, first, that would inject delay as we move towards consensus within the North Atlantic Council—there obviously is not room for delay in the situation; secondly, I am not sure whether NATO would have available a deployable headquarters for this operation.

We have clearly identified that a Canadian headquarters could be available. We would wish to have a brigade headquarters in order to provide the immediate command and control over our own troops.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North–East): May I offer my support to the right hon. Gentleman for the measured terms of his statement, and for the principles enunciated in it? I believe that I am right in saying that there was no express reference in his statement to the risks that will be run by United Kingdom forces that may be deployed to the area.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will not regard this as sounding an unduly sombre note, but does he accept that it would be wrong for the House to endorse the deployment of British forces without a recognition of the risks to life and limb that British service men and women may face? Are not those risks justified in this case only because of the acute nature of the humanitarian considerations involved?

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman will be aware that much of the difficulty experienced in the former Yugoslavia lay in the fact that the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council were often ambiguous and difficult to implement. Does he agree that the success of the operation will rest primarily on the United Nations producing a resolution that is clear, unambiguous and capable of implementation?

Mr. Portillo: I am most grateful for the hon. and learned Gentleman's support. He is right to say that there are risks involved. I will, of course, devote great efforts, as will all the planning staff, to minimising those risks, and particularly to ensuring that we have the rules of engagement, the equipment, and a deployment that will match the threats as we see them and enable our forces to respond accordingly.

I agree that the resolution has to be clear and sufficiently permissive. The hon. and learned Gentleman will know better than me, because of his longer experience, that in Bosnia one thing that was particularly hampering was the need to refer command decisions to New York. Nothing envisaged in this chapter 7 operation—it is not a blue-hatted operation—would require us to go back to New York for command decisions, which should properly lie in the field.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): The whole country will applaud Her Majesty's Government's decision to send our forces to join the task force. We all know that no troops are capable of doing the job better, as we have seen from experience. I am also pleased that the lessons of Bosnia have been learned—the proper chain of command, with one country in charge, which in Bosnia is the United Kingdom, with brown helmets being worn instead of blue United Nations helmets—and also the lessons of Somalia, where delivering humanitarian aid is one thing, but getting involved in trying to separate the belligerents in the civil war is something else, which we do not want to become engaged in.

How soon does my right hon. Friend think that African countries will be capable of taking over from the British commitment, which I gather will be temporary? Secondly, how can we ensure that the aid that gets through feeds the innocent and not the guilty men?

Thirdly, will he confirm that the cost of the operation will fall on the contingency fund and not on his own, heavily overstretched, defence budget?

Mr. Portillo: On the last point, I shall make that argument at least as vigorously as my hon. Friend. Seriously, however, I have been encouraged by the way in which the Bosnian operation has been financed largely from the contingency fund. Fresh statements will be made on that subject before long.

The issue of how we will stop aid getting through to the guilty takes me back to one of the major issues I mentioned a moment ago: what should be the balance in the operation between getting through humanitarian aid and disarming the militias? At the moment, I believe that the emphasis is on humanitarian aid, but the matter needs to be discussed further.

On the question of when we will be relieved, I can only repeat that I endorse the American principle that the operation should be for four months. I am pleased to see

African countries stepping forward, even at this stage, which gives me hope that they will be ready to take over at that time.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I should say that I was asked by the then Speaker to lead the first Inter-Parliamentary Union delegation to Zaire, in 1990. Do the Government realise that the writ of Kinshasa may not in operate in eastern Zaire, and that they will have to talk to the warlords or the governors of different provinces, especially if there is to be any type of opposed entry?

Where on earth are all those rocket launchers and other arms coming from? If British troops are to be sent, we had better find out who the arms suppliers are, because that sophisticated weaponry was certainly not made in Africa. It may be right or it may be wrong to go in, but I fear that the commitment will still be there long after I cease to be a Member of Parliament and—although he is a much younger man—long after the Secretary of State ceases to be a Member of Parliament. Once we are in, how do we get out of that place?

Mr. Portillo: First, I respect very much the hon. Gentleman's experience of Zaire. He is absolutely right to say that the writ of Kinshasa does not apply in eastern Zaire; we understand that perfectly. In my statement, I said rather carefully that we would seek the acquiescence of the Governments of the area, although I realise that there are warring factions. Our intention, however, is to enable food to reach people who are starving, which may very well involve us in having to stand up to some of those bandits and militias, some of whom are well armed.

I understand the fears expressed by the hon. Gentleman, and the fears expressed generally in the House. I could add another hundred reasons for thinking long and hard about the situation, and a hundred reasons for not taking any action. Finally, however, we must face the situation that confronts us. I do not believe that we have time to continue debating those issues. There are dangers, difficulties and uncertainties, but the begging need to do what we can to help those people is what must now guide us.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Does my right hon. Friend accept that it must be right to do everything we can, as swiftly as we can, to deal with the tragedies in that very dangerous and complex area of central Africa? Will he accept my congratulations on the fact that he has applied already a very strict series of questions to himself and to his proposals? I hope that he will continue applying them, because they are based on our very hard-won experience in other areas. Moreover, as he knows, things can go disastrously wrong, as the American operation in Somalia went wrong.

It is very early for the Secretary of State to answer all the questions he has been bombarded with, but will he undertake, before the final deployment begins, to inform the House whether we are sending troops on a peacekeeping mission, a peace-enforcing mission, or a mission that begins by protecting aid workers and ends up enforcing peace? We must have those absolutely basic concepts clear in our minds before the troops depart, and I am sure that he will give the House that information before they do.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that things can go wrong, and I am pleased that he agrees with the list of questions that we are applying to the matter. Further information would, of course, have to be given to the House before British troops deployed, other than the reconnaissance troops whom I have already mentioned.

Let me make one thing clear: I said in my statement that this would be a chapter 7 operation, and chapter 7 of the UN charter enables participating troops to follow the rules of engagement that are necessary not just for peacekeeping but for enforcement. They are more robust rules, which allow forces to do more to protect themselves and to secure the mission. I think that chapter 7 rules are absolutely appropriate.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I agree with the Secretary of State that an aid mission is essential, and I support the purposes to which he has subscribed. However, I have one serious doubt; he touched on it, but I would like him, if he could, to say a little more about the central question of disarming the militias.

As the right hon. Gentleman rightly said, it will be impossible to get the refugees back into Rwanda unless the militias are dealt with, but that is a task for the slightly longer term. The immediate problem will be if the militias prevent the humanitarian aid from being delivered. I recall that that was the problem in Bosnia, which drove us from a UN action to a NATO enforcement action. Will the Secretary of State take full account of that in his forward planning for this operation?

Mr. Portillo: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his support. The outline of the answer to his question is at least clear. We are deploying under chapter 7, which gives us the more robust rules of engagement; our objective is to enable aid to reach the people who are starving; and if some people stand in our way, they must be prepared to face the consequences of their action.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I, too, agree with my right hon. Friend, and appreciate especially his careful assurances that there will be no hasty deployment. However, he will be aware that some people will probably put him under pressure to ensure that deployment takes place rather more quickly than those who give him military advice might like, on the ground that every day or week of delay means that thousands of people are dying. Will he assure the House that, whatever the date of deployment, we shall not embark on the exercise unless we have the full and wholehearted co-operation of the United States forces' logistic command?

Mr. Portillo: I thank my right hon. Friend warmly for his support. It is, of course, of great importance to me and to the success of the mission that the United States is fully involved. It is involved as a participant country, but I want to make it clear that the Canadians accept that strong United States support for their headquarters and command elements will be necessary for the mission to be a success. We have the assurance of the United States' involvement, which also distinguishes this operation from Bosnia in the days of the United Nations' UNPROFOR mission.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I think most of us would endorse the action taken so far, but does the Secretary of State accept, first, that the way in which the discussions have taken place at the United Nations and

[Mr. Mike Gapes]

elsewhere proves once again the need for a long-term strategy to reform the way in which the UN deals with such crises? It is no good having to go through this process every time something happens; there needs to be continual earmarking and planning so that we can move more quickly, rather than having to delay while people are suffering or starving.

Secondly, does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there might be a problem in trying to feed the millions of people affected by this conflict while at the same time attempting to move them from where they are now back to Rwanda and Burundi? In those circumstances, is he considering air drops or other means of getting the food through, rather than waiting for the militias to be disarmed to enable the food to be got through?

Mr. Portillo: We shall consider any measure that will help to get food to the starving people, but we must be guided by the agencies, United Nations and civilian, that will have the task of supplying the food. Air dropping into an area with a large number of people in an insalubrious camp could cause a riot and deaths. One has to be extremely careful when planning such operations. We shall do whatever seems best in the circumstances.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's comments on the workings of the United Nations from an idealistic point of view, but, because the operations are so complicated, they are bound to rest on the leading nations of the world. Those nations are bound to want command and control to be under a recognised nation with the capability to carry it out.

It pains me to say so, but, for the time being, the United States is clearly not willing to put its troops under United Nations command. It is willing for them to be put under United States command or under the command of a friendly nation with which it can participate fully, giving it a good say in the rules of engagement and the command and control procedures.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): Looking to the future, what conversations has my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had with his counterparts in southern Africa? It will be for those countries and their neighbours to take over part of the burden. In particular, what conversations has he had on the cost of their taking over part of that burden? Those countries, unfortunately, are not blessed with a Consolidated Fund such as that which we can draw from.

Mr. Portillo: I have had no conversations with my opposite numbers, but there have been discussions between the military that have produced the results that I have mentioned. There has been an encouraging response from the countries of southern Africa.

As for the cost, the formula should be that those that can afford it should contribute. Some rich nations do not yet feature on the list of troop contributors. There are certain big names among them—we can all think of some. I very much hope that they will be major contributors, and will, in particular, help the African countries to participate and to follow on.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement. I am sure that the whole House recognises the human tragedy being enacted in Zaire and Rwanda. Although this is a chapter 7 operation, I am concerned that the rules of engagement should be sufficiently robust to ensure that those of our troops that are committed can properly defend themselves, can properly get the aid through and can properly fulfil other functions, such as disarming some of the militias that are preventing local families from going back home. Will the Secretary of State give us an assurance on that?

Mr. Portillo: I would not allow British troops to go under rules of engagement that did not enable them to defend themselves sufficiently. The United States would also not allow its forces to go unless the rules of engagement were clear on that point.

The disarming of the militias is a matter not for the rules of engagement but for the objectives. As I have explained, thus far the United States has taken the clear view that the operation should be humanitarian only, and should not extend to the disarming of the militias. There is room for more debate on that, but that is the situation at the moment.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would not deploy British troops lightly, and I am confident that the Government are right in that difficult decision. Will he bear it in mind, however, that we are inviting our troops to leave home over the Christmas and new year period? Will he therefore ensure that there is adequate communication between the troops and their families over that period? That will be of great importance to their morale and to their families at a time of great overstretch.

Will my right hon. Friend also ensure that the civilian force that he employs all over the country—a force on which the troops will depend—has all the resources necessary now and in the future, beyond the Budget?

Mr. Portillo: On the last point, my hon. Friend will have to wait for the Budget. I remind him that I am committed to stability in the resourcing of our armed forces and I intend to keep my promises. I am particularly grateful for my hon. Friend's support, because I know how much he has thought about the problem and how much he understands the difficulties of such an operation. He has made some typically excellent points about the welfare of the armed forces, and they will receive my urgent attention.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Even as the Secretary of State responds to this appalling humanitarian crisis, will he look beyond that crisis, which was predictable and predicted, and take up again the proposal by the former Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary of State to the General Assembly, and again by Warren Christopher during his recent African tour? That proposal was for the creation of an African crisis force, trained, supplied and perhaps even financed by the world community, and ready to intervene at such times of crisis.

Mr. Portillo: I think that an excellent idea; it is the only long-term way forward. Indeed, I would have loved to think that this situation could be handled now by African forces. But it is the correct view of the United Nations that the complexity of what is being faced now is

too much for most African forces at their present level of training. That can be improved in the future, and we must bend our efforts to achieving it.

Sir Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, and that of the Prime Minister. Let us not forget the non-governmental organisations and the brave people working in them: Save the Children, Oxfam, Concern Worldwide, and CAFOD—the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development. They have been on the borders but have had to withdraw. Unlike in other desperate crises, they already have the food and medicine available, and as soon as they are given protection, they can move quickly back in to do the work which I am sure we would all want them to do. We can all remember the original Rwandan tragedy, and the fact that the United Nations was unable to operate then. That sowed the seeds of this disaster, which is worse than the original Rwandan one.

I greatly welcome this prompt and decisive action. Having seen our troops in action in other parts of the world, I take enormous pride in their professionalism and the speed with which they can move in and bring the stability that enables a humanitarian effort to work.

Mr. Portillo: The whole House will applaud what my hon. Friend has said. He is right to pay tribute not just to our armed forces but to the many brave people who work for the civilian agencies and who have done splendid work trying to save lives—at considerable risk to themselves. A great ordeal lies ahead of them; I know that they will want to rejoin those efforts when the troops arrive to make sure that food supplies get through.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I am sure I speak for many when I express my concern about the tremendous need for speed to get the food there—1 million people are on the verge of death by starvation, so something must be done to take them food as quickly as possible.

If the Secretary of State intends to use British troops and others to carry out the forcible repatriation of refugees from Zaire to Rwanda and Burundi, that could give rise to enormous complications, and could bring the troops directly into conflict. That is clearly not the purpose of the mission.

Finally, will the right hon. Gentleman recognise the importance, during and after this tragedy, of examining the failure of the United Nations to deal with the Rwandan crisis; and of examining the constant support offered by a number of western Governments to the dictatorship in Zaire, which has helped to foment this desperate crisis?

Mr. Portillo: I am sure that there will be an opportunity for a post mortem on all these issues. I am not qualified to speak about them, but I shall deal with the hon. Gentleman's point about forcible repatriation. Yesterday's statement from Washington distinctly mentioned facilitating voluntary repatriation—an element of the statement with which I strongly associate myself.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Does my right hon. Friend accept that a number of Conservative Members are worried and have great reservations about this project? If the Hutu militia are not to be disarmed, does he agree that the chances of achieving our objectives are much less; and that, although we may save thousands of people from starving over the next four months, if we then leave and the militias are still armed, people will starve next year, too?

What proportion of the cost will be met by the British taxpayer? If the money is not to come from my right hon. Friend's budget, I would expect it to come out of the ODA budget, not the contingency fund.

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend says that he is worried and has reservations. There is not a person in the House who is not worried and who does not have reservations. If there is, there should not be; it is a worrying situation. One must have reservations about what we are getting into, but we are quite rightly being guided by the compelling case for getting assistance to the people who are about to starve. My hon. Friend again raises the question whether we should be disarming the militias. That needs to be considered very carefully, but it is not part of the mission that has yet been described to us by the Americans in their statement yesterday.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I think that all of us in the House, and, indeed, outside it, will recognise the very forthright way in which the Secretary of State has addressed a very complex and grave situation. Will he expand slightly on the nature of the reconnaissance force that is being sent? How will it link back to the House, himself, the United Nations, Canada and all others involved? Will its reports be the ones that decide whether we deploy troops directly? That is obviously of concern to myself and other hon. Members who have raised the matter, who represent constituencies that have substantial numbers of personnel who might be involved.

Mr. Portillo: The reconnaissance force that we are sending might number about 40, so it is very small; but it is full of specialists who understand the needs of terrain, airfields, water supplies and sewerage, as well as those who can make assessments about the military position on the ground. I believe that they will take their own communications with them and communicate back to the permanent joint headquarters that was established earlier this year.

The force will be particularly useful not only in giving us general intelligence about the situation but in informing us about what sort of British deployment we would need to design, and what difficulties we might face. At this stage, I have altered the notice to move only of those elements at the centre of the joint rapid deployment force: 1 Para, 45 Commando and 5 Airborne headquarters.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): It is very easy for all of us in this House, in the comfort of these green Benches, to beat our breasts and talk about assisting people, and make ourselves feel better. Having served in Africa in 1979 and 1980, during the deployment to Zimbabwe, I should like to put a key point to my right hon. Friend.

When the troops get to that continent, they will find on the ground something considerably more difficult than has possibly been imagined by those sitting in Whitehall. I was quite close to the planning stage, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will take that up again with the chiefs of staff when he sees them. I recall most specifically—my

[Mr. Iain Duncan Smith]

hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, sitting next to my right hon. Friend on the Front Bench, will also recall this—that most of the plans had to be redrawn completely when we arrived on the ground, given the nature of poor communications. Those communications were infinitely better than those that exist in Zaire.

Mr. Portillo: I very much respect the experience of my hon. and gallant Friend. Fortunately, the British armed forces have substantial experience of Africa, although relatively less of this region. We shall draw on what expertise we have.

I am afraid that, even when working within clear objectives, one quite often has to rewrite many of one's plans when one arrives in the place where the operations take place. I agree with my right hon. Friend, though, that it is particularly complicated in Africa. That has been taken into account. I really do not believe that anybody in Whitehall, whether in uniform or in a suit, is approaching the matter lightly with any misconceptions about the complexity of what we are involved in.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I share the Secretary of State's sentiment that there is a compelling case for moving in such a way. May I press him a little further on command and control issues, especially given his comments on the Canadian lead role?

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman's comments about the positive nature of the Canadians, but they are clearly lacking in the communications necessary to perform such a role. Does he envisage our forces providing any of that communications skill, and if so, how does he square that with his earlier stated position about ensuring that our battalions will be covered by a means of withdrawal that will totally protect the entire British force? Might not some of our forces be under withdrawal plans that are controlled by the Canadians or others?

Mr. Portillo: I repeat that I think that the Canadian headquarters would need to be supplemented by United States forces. I have not yet received any request to supplement the Canadian headquarters with British forces, but it is conceivable that that will happen. We will be involved in setting up our headquarters and communications. If we were asked to supply communications to another headquarters, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that we would work in a multinational environment, and we would have the protection not only of the Canadian withdrawal plan but of the United States withdrawal plan. That emphasises the reasons to ensure that command and control across the whole operation is clear, and that the rules of engagement are common from one end of the operation to the other.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement to the House so early in the contingency planning for that dire humanitarian emergency. I also wish to express my appreciation of his prescience in the establishment of the permanent joint headquarters at Northwood for the contingency planning, but I must say that the insertion of British troops into tribal warfare in Francophone black Africa is something that we have never undertaken before.

Will my right hon. Friend consult the Belgians and the French who have experience in that theatre and who have found that their efforts of pacification have to be repeated time and again, because massacre and brutality, famine and bloodshed, have characterised central Africa for many a long year, and are likely to do so for some time ahead? We never involved ourselves in the civil wars in Mozambique, Angola, Ethiopia or Biafra.

Can my right hon. Friend assure me that Zaire will not become a precedent for Her Majesty's forces? If the Government decide, on the advice of the reconnaissance party, to send a humanitarian aid mission because it is deemed militarily to be feasible, my right hon. Friend will have my full support, but can he reassure me that, in those circumstances, the Government will make no further reductions in the defence budget?

Mr. Portillo: I cannot say anything more about the defence budget than I have already said. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments about the permanent joint headquarters; the same is true, if I may say so, of the joint rapid deployment force. It is true that we are well positioned to make a rapid response to a crisis wherever it may occur in the world. We have been training people, both in headquarters and in units, so that they can leave the United Kingdom at short notice to undertake a task that they may not have known much about a few hours or days before.

My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the dangers implicit in the mission, but I remind him that we have had recent successes in Rwanda and Angola. We have had British forces in those areas undertaking time-limited operations that were successes. That does not lead me to be complacent, but fortunately we have a wider base of knowledge than my hon. Friend implied.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): If the militia are not disarmed, what assurances can the Secretary of State give the House that our troops will not, in effect, be protecting those Hutu militia that have carried out the most awful genocide of 800,000 of their people? Would he care to comment on reports that one of our close allies, the French, have been involved in supplying those militia? Certainly somebody is.

Mr. Portillo: I certainly would not wish to comment on the second point. I have no basis for believing any such thing. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the situation will be complicated. That is why I said that it was worth giving careful thought to the issue, given its complexity. To go to feed people is one thing, and will be risky enough and manpower-intensive enough; but to go to take arms away from people who are determined to hold on to those arms is a different sort of military operation, with much greater risks for the forces involved. I do not have a closed mind on the issue, but the hon. Gentleman will understand why I am reluctant to leap at one go into a mission of such complexity and danger.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): As one who visited Zaire with the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) in 1990, I underline what he said about the total non-existence of political and other administration even then—and we know that the present position is even worse. Will the mission being sent to Zaire take some part in seeking to establish some order in terms of

administration, including groups that will ensure fair and proper distribution of food aid, so that we do not see mothers with babies on their backs being beaten about as they scramble for food, and often not succeeding in getting any?

Mr. Portillo: Again, I am struck by my hon. Friend's experience of the area. He draws attention to important issues. We are taking on a humanitarian responsibility very far from home, but we do not have a responsibility for the government of the area. My opposite number, the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), urged me earlier not to allow mission drift, yet, in the course of these questions, I am being invited to drift into a subject far from humanitarian aid—the establishment of order across Zaire, which would be very difficult.

None the less, my hon. Friend is right to raise the question, because, if we are feeding people, we need to ensure that the aid is evenly distributed and that crime does not affect the process. Again, that will take much thinking through. We shall have to come back to the issue later.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): To what extent have the Government had encouragement, or otherwise, for the mission from the Commonwealth states in east Africa, and from the Organisation of African Unity? May I take the Secretary of State back to what my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said about the sources of supply of arms for the militia? If we as an international community do not stop those sources of supply, there is a terrible prospect that the mission, which I too support, will simply provide a four-month feeding break for the needy, only to be replaced when we have to withdraw by further atrocities.

Mr. Portillo: I remind the hon. Gentleman that, in my statement, I covered the United Nations Secretary-General's proposal for an international political initiative—an international conference by which the political causes of the conflict could be addressed. Such a conference would be bound to deal with the arming of the factions, the source of the arms and whether a disarmament programme could be put into effect.

As for support from African nations, I have nothing to add to the list that I read out earlier, but as I read it rather quickly, I shall mention the names again. The African countries in which we believe there is interest are South Africa, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Gambia, Tunisia, Kenya, Botswana, Ethiopia, Mali and Chad.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Will my right hon. Friend accept my congratulations on the measured, thoughtful and thorough way in which he is proceeding? In view of the great danger, will he consider carefully one small pragmatic point—the possibility of providing armoured protected mobility for our troops?

Mr. Portillo: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's kind remarks. He leads me into something specific—the nature of the vehicles in which our troops will travel—but let me make a broader point. As we learned in Bosnia, to deploy small numbers of men, lightly armed, in what is known in the jargon as thin skins—thin-skinned vehicles—places them in danger. I am sure that our military planners will make a full assessment of the threat, and will ensure that the equipment with which the troops go—in terms of weaponry and vehicles, as well as clothing and helmets—is appropriate.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): I support the humanitarian measures that my right hon. Friend proposed. I have no doubt that the British forces could deal with the Hutu militia—or any other militia—if that is what we decided to do; but surely the humanitarian measures are a palliative. We would seek to bind wounds that would reopen as soon as we had left.

Does my right hon. Friend believe that the position in Africa today is what the de-colonisers of 30 years ago had in mind, when they said that the ordinary people of Africa should be given control over their own destiny?

Mr. Portillo: I recognise the truth of what my hon. and gallant Friend says about the British forces. Obviously, they would be superior to any forces that they could encounter, but none the less, the risks that they face could be considerable. I have no illusions that any number of troops from western countries on the ground in any part of Africa will settle political issues. Political issues will have to be settled between Governments—nay, between tribes—being brought together in international forums. Those issues cannot be settled by our soldiers on the ground.

Business of the House

4.30 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I should like to make a statement about the business for next week:

MONDAY 18 NOVEMBER—Consideration of money resolution relating to the Firearms (Amendment) Bill.

Consideration of allocation of time motion relating to the Firearms (Amendment) Bill.

Consideration in Committee of the Firearms (Amendment) Bill (First Day).

TUESDAY 19 NOVEMBER—Conclusion of consideration in Committee of the Firearms (Amendment) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 20 NOVEMBER—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Opposition Day [2nd allotted day]. There will be a debate on the national health service on an Opposition motion.

THURSDAY 21 NOVEMBER—Until 7 pm, debate on the impact of a windfall tax on the privatised utilities on a Government motion.

FRIDAY 22 NOVEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

On a rather less provisional basis than usual, I anticipate that the business for the following week will be as follows:

MONDAY 25 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill.

TUESDAY 26 NOVEMBER—My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will open his Budget statement.

WEDNESDAY 27 NOVEMBER—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House. In the afternoon, continuation of the Budget debate.

THURSDAY 28 NOVEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate.

FRIDAY 29 NOVEMBER—Debate on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 2 DECEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate, which will be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 3 December.

The House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 20 November, there will be a debate on waste management strategy in European Standing Committee A, and a debate on economic and monetary union in European Standing Committee B.

The House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 27 November, there will a debate on water for human consumption in European Standing Committee A, and a debate on the former Yugoslavia in European Standing Committee B.

The House may also find it helpful to know that, subject to the progress of business, it will be proposed that the House should rise on Thursday 19 December for the Christmas Adjournment until Monday 13 January.

[*Wednesday 20 November:*

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community document: 9651/96, Strategy for Waste Management. Relevant European Legislation Committee report: HC 36-i (1996-97).

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community documents: COM(96) 499, Introduction of the Euro; 10893/96, Reinforced Convergence Procedures and a New Exchange Rate Mechanism; 10892/96, Stability Pact for Ensuring Budgetary Discipline in Stage 3 of EMU. Relevant European Legislation Committee report: HC 36-ii (1996-97).

Wednesday 27 November:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community document: 7208/95, Water for Human Consumption. Relevant European Legislation Committee reports: HC 70-xxii (1994-95), HC 51-v, HC 51-xxii and HC 51-xxix (1995-96).

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community documents: (i) 7312/96, Former Yugoslavia: Aid for Reconstruction and Rehabilitation; (ii) 10602/96, Future Contractual Relations with Certain Countries in South-Eastern Europe. Relevant European Legislation Committee reports: (i) HC 51-xxiii, HC 51-xxvi and HC 51-xxix (1995-96); (ii) HC 36-ii (1996-97).]

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I thank the Leader of the House for that information. In view of the statement that was made earlier about Zaire, I am sure that I do not need to urge the Leader of the House to ensure that the House is kept informed of any developments, but I hope that he will confirm that.

Following last night's events, when the voting figures read out by the Whip on the result of the second vote were incorrect, but the accurate figures were printed in *Hansard*, will the Leader of the House tell us whether there has been any change in the practice whereby, as in the past, the actual vote announcement has always been recorded in *Hansard*, with any correction made in a way that acknowledges any mistake that has been made?

The Leader of the House will know that there is a great deal of interest in the debate on guns next week, and he will also know that the change in the business that he has announced—the extension of the debate to two days—will cause problems for some hon. Members. To minimise the difficulties that they will face, and to maximise the number of people here, will he make public as soon as possible the terms of the guillotine motion that he will move? Even at this late stage, will the Government reconsider their decision not to allow a free vote on the issue?

Has the Leader of the House seen the motion that has been tabled by the Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation, on the documents relating to reinforced convergence procedures, a new exchange rate mechanism and a stability pact for ensuring budgetary discipline in stage 3 of economic and monetary union? Those are undoubtedly major issues, and the motion on the Order Paper demanding that those matters be debated on the Floor of the House has been signed by hon. Members of all parties, and by those who take differing views on European issues. Will the Leader of the House reconsider his decision that those matters should be considered in Committee? I have raised similar issues in the past and although he has said that he understands the concerns, as yet we have not had the debate on the Floor of the House that the Select Committee has pressed for. Will he reconsider his decision on that important matter?

Finally, given that 5 million people have chosen to be in the state earnings-related pensions scheme, and in the light of the reports today that the Government intend to

abolish SERPS, will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on pensions, so that the House has an opportunity to discuss the plight of the millions of low-paid people who would suffer if the Government ever forced them to leave SERPS?

Mr. Newton: On Zaire, as on Bosnia—as I think I have demonstrated—I shall, of course, bear very much in mind the need to keep the House informed of developments as appropriate from time to time.

On last night's voting figures, I am certainly not aware of any change in the practice, although I do not think that it is strictly a matter for me. I think that there was perhaps a misunderstanding last night, which led to the figures not being recorded in *Hansard* initially as they had been announced in the House. I am sure that all those concerned with the matter will have noted the way in which the hon. Lady raised that point.

On the two questions related to the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, I am not in a position to add to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said only an hour and a half ago, on the basis of the voting. On the allocation of time motion, the hon. Lady will be aware that that is the subject of discussion in the usual channels and with others interested in the matter. We are anxious to achieve maximum agreement, but I shall table the motion as soon as I can to enable people to plan.

On the motion concerning the scrutiny arrangements for the documents to which the hon. Lady referred, obviously I always carefully consider the representations made to me. In addition, a number of my hon. Friends—some of whom are present in the Chamber at the moment—have spoken to me about it. I hope that the hon. Lady will understand that there are a whole range of considerations to be taken into account. No one is disputing the importance of the matters. On the other hand, as I well know—having heard my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer talk on them—they are also matters of very considerable detail and technicality. I cleave to the view that the Standing Committee procedures—whereby Ministers can be questioned and a debate can take place—have a good deal to commend them.

There is obviously also the issue of timing, in that the Economic and Finance Council is on 2 December. One has only to look at the business that I have announced for between now and 2 December—including the best part of a week taken up by the Budget debate—to know the difficulty in finding time on the Floor of the House. We expect to arrange a debate in the usual way before the European Council meeting on 13 and 14 December, in which EMU will be a major ingredient, so there will be a considerable opportunity to discuss those matters of the Floor of the House.

On SERPS, the story in *The Daily Telegraph*, to which the hon. Lady was presumably referring, is seriously misleading. It does not reflect Government policy and it contains several errors: it seriously overstates the future cost of SERPS; it suggests wrongly that the real value of the basic pension will decline; and it suggests that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security visited Chile, when in fact it was the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), the Chairman of the Social Security Committee.

Sir Harold Walker (Doncaster, Central): Is the Leader of the House satisfied that he has got his priorities right? Where, in the course of all the business that he has announced today, is the opportunity for Ministers to explain how they will respond to the grave problem facing 800 of my constituents, the loss of whose jobs has been announced today—200 at the former railway workshops as a consequence of the Government's crippling railway policy, and 600 because, instead of investing in this country, Du Pont has decided to transfer its production from Doncaster to Germany? That runs counter to the Prime Minister's repeated hollow claims. Will a Minister answer those questions?

Mr. Newton: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's reasons for raising those matters and I am sure that he will have an opportunity to raise them in the Budget debate and in other economic debates. He should perhaps also acknowledge that Du Pont has decided to embark on a £60 million expansion of its Gloucester plant, which clearly demonstrates its commitment to the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): Referring again to notice of motion No. 23, on European Standing Committee B debating documents relating to EMU, convergence procedures, a new exchange rate mechanism and a stability pact, may I put it to my right hon. Friend that it is imperative that the House as a whole should have an opportunity to vote on those matters?

The many hon. Members of all parties who are acutely concerned about the future of British economic management and the dominance of the House in that matter can go to European Standing Committees as interested participants, but cannot vote. Is not it therefore essential that the House should be able to vote to let its view be known before the Chancellor of the Exchequer goes to ECOFIN and perhaps commits us to something that most Conservative Members, at any rate, would not agree to?

Mr. Newton: There is not a great deal that I can add to what I said a few moments ago, except that I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding the House, as perhaps I should have done, that not only the members of the Committee can take part in debate—as distinct from voting, as he rightly says—but any hon. Member; it is important that that should be recognised. He is right to say that such matters should be discussed before ECOFIN on 2 December; that is one of the considerations that I have taken into account.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): From a rather different perspective from that of the previous questioner, may I simply impress upon the Leader of the House that there is, as the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) said, all-party support for discussing the issue on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Newton: I do indeed take note of that, as I hope that I have shown on many occasions.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): May I again draw my right hon. Friend's attention to notice of motion No. 23? This is not a concerted effort, but in view of the fact that Opposition Front Benchers have expressed a view on the matter and shown such keenness for a debate

[Mr. Iain Duncan Smith]

on the Floor of the House, I am sure that, through the usual channels, time could be found for such a debate before ECOFIN.

Mr. Newton: Once again, I note what my hon. Friend says. I am grateful for his assurance that there is no concerted effort although, frankly, I do not think that I could complain if there were—indeed, I would not complain—but I still cannot add to what I said earlier.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): Just a quick reinforcement of what has already been said.

Madam Speaker: This is getting tedious and repetitious.

Mr. Shore: The crucial point is that ECOFIN meets on 2 December, and some crucial decisions will be taken. It would be intolerable if the House did not have the opportunity to debate the matter in full and to vote upon it if need be.

Mr. Newton: I made it perfectly clear earlier that no one is disputing the importance of those matters, although there is a difference of judgment about the best way in which the discussion can take place. Apart from that, I am simply tempted to ask, in the same good-natured way as that in which the right hon. Gentleman asked his question: when is a concert not concerted?

Madam Speaker: I call Dr. Spink, to ask something different.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Important though ECOFIN is to my constituents, they would want me to press today for a debate on the damage that over-development can do to our communities, so that we can reinforce councils' spine in resisting inappropriate development and seeking support from the Secretary of State for the Environment when they do so.

Mr. Newton: That sounds like advance notice of a question that my hon. Friend will ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment next Tuesday. I am not sure that I will encourage him to do so, but I shall warn my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does the Leader of the House recall saying a few moments ago that Members of Parliament would be on holiday for nearly four weeks at Christmas? They had 11 weeks in the summer, and 18 weeks in all this year, yet the Tories to a man and a woman poured scorn on the idea that British workers should have a minimum of three weeks' paid holiday. If Members of Parliament can have 18 weeks' paid holiday, British workers should get the same.

If the Government are worried about the Common Market directive, why does not the right hon. Gentleman arrange for British legislation to be introduced in the next week on behalf of British workers—men and women who would love to have three weeks' paid holiday—so that we can deliver it in 24 hours?

Mr. Newton: That is a pretty hoary old point. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that, although most hon. Members will expect to have Christmas off, along with most other people, the equation between a parliamentary recess and a holiday, bearing in mind the amount of work that hon. Members do in their constituencies, is plain silly.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Does my right hon. Friend recall the resolution of the House of October 1990, which makes it crystal clear that no Minister of the Crown—including, of course, the Chancellor of the Exchequer—would be empowered to make a decision in any of the Councils of the European Union until a debate had taken place in the House, if the Select Committee on European Legislation so recommended?

Does my right hon. Friend therefore appreciate the importance of a proper debate, in which the views of the House as a whole on such fundamental matters as the stability pact and the exchange rate mechanism can be expressed? A discussion in Standing Committee would be wholly inadequate, for reasons that he understands perfectly well, so will he ensure that the matter is reviewed at the highest level in Government, so that we can consider it on the Floor of the House well before decisions are taken in ECOFIN at the beginning of December?

Mr. Newton: I have several times made it clear that part of the reason for what I have proposed is the need to ensure that discussion takes place before 2 December. I am well aware of my hon. Friend's strength of feeling, and he will not mind my saying that he was one of those who underlined the matter to me less formally, but I am afraid that I still cannot add to what I have already said at the Dispatch Box this afternoon.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): As it is 500 days since Keith Mangan and Paul Wells were taken hostage in Kashmir, will the Leader of the House arrange for the Foreign Secretary to make a statement next week explaining what further action the Foreign Office intends to take to try to find those two British citizens, plus the two other people taken hostage at the same time, especially as leading Kashmiri politicians have offered to try to mediate? What will be done to persuade the Indian Government to issue visas to those, including Members of both Houses of Parliament, who believe that they can help in mediating and in trying to find the hostages?

Mr. Newton: I cannot commit my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary to a statement, but I know that he will study the hon. Gentleman's remarks carefully and that the British Government will continue to do all that they can. I note in passing that my right hon. and learned Friend is due to answer questions on Wednesday 27 November.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Returning to European Standing Committee B, may I ask my right hon. Friend why is there such a rush? Have I misunderstood the Government's policy, or is it wait and see? Is there a reason for many of us to bite our tongues if the Government are rushing ahead with the proposals? If we have not discussed them in time for 2 December, why do we not exercise our veto? The stability pact requires a unanimous vote in the Council of Ministers. That should not affect the process of monetary union, because that

impinges on 1999, not December 1996. It seems odd for a Government who purport to promote the role of national Parliaments in the European Union to short-circuit procedures in this way, to meet a deadline that seems to be irrelevant—unless there are binding provisions that cut in before the third stage of monetary union.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): Is he a friend of yours?

Mr. Newton: He is my constituency neighbour, although one might not have thought it from his question.

In many ways, my hon. Friend is introducing an argument that he might make when he attends the debate, but I shall, of course, bring it to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. What is happening demonstrates the importance of the United Kingdom continuing to take a close interest in those matters, because while none of provisions will apply to the UK if we decide not to participate in stage 3, we clearly would be affected by them.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does the Leader of the House agree that European Standing Committee B comprises the extremities of views on the merits of the European Union; that the tabling of such a motion is unprecedented; that a few years ago, it would have been within the powers of the Committee to decide whether the matter should be debated on the Floor; and that it was Government action that prevented that power of the Committee from being continued? In view of the country's concern at the encroachment of Government views on the procedures of the House, is it not wrong that a Committee that is entirely concerned with procedure, and not the merits of a case, should be overridden in that way?

Mr. Newton: On the spread of views in the Committee, the answer is clearly yes. I am not in a position to give quite such clear-cut answers to the hon. Gentleman's other questions. However, I shall make a point that I could have made earlier but did not in case it was thought inflammatory. Since 1990, the House has voted for extensive changes to its procedures to reduce the amount of business done on the Floor of the House and to remit more business to Standing Committees.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), I am sure that the Leader of the House spoke in good faith when he said that he would report from time to time on Zaire. However, there are some urgent problems about which there should be a report on Monday. What about the millions, perhaps billions, of pounds that President Mobutu has stacked away? What is the position on arms manufacturers? Are British troops to be subject—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman rightly put his question on that to the Secretary of State for Defence. If he is now asking for a statement next week, that is one thing, but he cannot go into such detail with the Leader of the House, who is concerned with next week's business.

Mr. Dalyell: I am concerned about a statement next week as to whether—

Madam Speaker: I understand that. The hon. Gentleman saw me earlier today about a statement, which he has now had. Is he seeking to press the Leader of the House for more information? He may, of course, do that, but he must not go into details about which the Leader of the House is not in a position to answer at this stage.

Mr. Dalyell: I hope that there will be a statement on Monday on injections to troops, on the Gurkhas and on whether there will be a report back on the crucial matter of the reconnaissance unit, which was raised by the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing). Is Parliament to be told what that unit discovers, especially in relation to the warlords and governors?

Mr. Newton: I did not say that I would report to the House from time to time because I am not in a position to do so. I said that I would seek to arrange appropriate reports. It has to be a matter of judgment as to when it is appropriate to make further reports. I shall bear in mind the sort of factors that the hon. Gentleman raised, but I cannot make a commitment now to another statement on Monday.

Mr. Tony Banks: May I reiterate last week's request for a debate on London? Last week, I mentioned the London Research Centre report, "The Capital Divided". This week we have heard that the London Pride Partnership is to publish a manifesto for London and to ask hon. Members to back it in the run-up to the general election. Yesterday, Sir Norman Foster's master plan for London, involving Trafalgar square, Whitehall and Parliament square was announced. When will London Members have an opportunity to say something and get involved in the big issues that affect the capital city? The Leader of the House announced that there would be an Adjournment debate on 29 November, for which no subject has been announced. Can he say that that debate will be on London affairs?

Mr. Newton: I cannot say that. Although we have not yet made a final decision, that debate is likely to be on another matter. I shall bear in mind the continued pressure for a debate on London.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): What will happen on Wednesday in European Standing Committee B if enough hon. Members turn up, so that there are not enough seats for us all to participate in the debate on the documents mentioned in notice of motion No. 23? Would the debate have to be transferred to the Floor, whether the House was sitting as a Standing Committee or, more sensibly, as normal?

Mr. Newton: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has in mind some plan of that sort, but despite his blandishments, I cannot add to what I have said several times already.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Health to explain why yesterday he announced a White Paper not to the House, but to a press conference? Will he confirm that there are no legislative proposals in the White Paper? If there are not, what is its purpose other than to use civil servants to put forward Tory party propaganda?

Mr. Newton: I saw that point trailed in one of the Sunday papers. The notion that a White Paper is not a

[Mr. Newton]

White Paper unless it contains proposals for legislation is one of the silliest that I have heard for some time. It would mean that White Papers on a wide range of subjects—including foreign policy, which rarely requires legislation—would be deemed out of order. That is nonsense.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): May I tell the Leader of the House that he cannot dodge the question of the whipped vote on handguns? There is outrage throughout Scotland and, probably, the whole United Kingdom, that the Government are imposing a three-line Whip on a matter of conscience. Will he explain what is the difference between having a free vote on caning and not having one on handguns? It is outrageous and I do not think that the Government will get away with it.

Mr. Newton: I did not dodge the question at all; I simply referred back to the clear answer that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had given.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Can we have a debate before 12 December on the World Trade Organisation and child labour? On that day, the WTO will meet in Singapore and the British Government will seek to veto the efforts of America and other nations to place child labour on the WTO agenda. The Leader of the House will know that this week the International Labour Organisation published a report that shows that 250 million children—double previous estimates—work around the world in the most disgusting conditions. They often produce goods that are sold in our high streets. If we are to combat child labour, the House would like to be involved. The debate should take place before Britain shames itself by vetoing the placing of child labour on the agenda.

Mr. Newton: The position, which I imagine the hon. Gentleman understands—although one might not have thought it from his question—is that we fully support action to combat child labour, but that the issue is, and should remain, outside the remit of the World Trade Organisation. We consider international labour standards to be a matter for the International Labour Organisation and we support its proposal to hold a convention to tackle the problem.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When can we debate an unbelievable situation that does great discredit to the Government, and which is described in early-day motion 171?

[That this House notes that, since 21st October 1996 when the Social Security (Adjudication) and Child Support Amendment (No. 2) Regulations (S.I., 1996, No. 2450) came into force, appeals to social security, disability and child support appeal tribunals, which in the past could be made by letter, must be lodged on an official form which, three weeks later, still does not exist; notes that appellants are required to include in their appeal a summary of their arguments, which will deter many from appealing; further notes that an oral hearing will be held only if specifically requested, despite the fact that appeals heard in the appellant's absence are much less likely to succeed and that the recommendation of the Council on Tribunals that the importance of seeking an oral hearing should be emphasised in the information provided to appellants has been ignored, with the result that many more appeals will be heard in the absence of the appellant and most of them will fail; notes that, contrary to the advice of the Council on Tribunals, the minimum period of notice of an oral hearing has been reduced from 10 to seven days, making it more difficult for voluntary bodies to provide representation and further reducing the likelihood of success; and calls for the immediate suspension of the regulations, followed by a period of consultation on ways of combining justice and efficiency in the operation of the tribunal service.]

On 21 October, new regulations came in governing social security and child support appeals, which mean that it will no longer be possible to appeal by letter in the usual way and that appeals must be made by completing a special form. I asked the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans), the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, to put a copy of the form in the Library. He told me in a written reply that the copy was in the Library, but when I checked, it was an old form about a different subject. Last week, the Minister apologised for the misinformation given to me and announced, incredibly, that the forms have not yet been printed.

Surely it is right that those regulations be now withdrawn, because many people, possibly hundreds of thousands, and many of them less articulate than most, will not be able to cope with them. Those regulations are unjust. Should not they be withdrawn until the House debates that bizarre situation?

Mr. Newton: I am not familiar with the detail of some of what the hon. Gentleman described, but I shall ensure that it is explored as soon as possible with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security.

The regulations seem to me to be important to allow for improvements to the service offered to applicants—that is their aim. Any delay in those regulations coming into force would simply delay the point at which those necessary improvements could be made.

Division (Correction)

5.1 pm

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Lord Commissioner to the Treasury): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wish to inform the House that an incorrect vote was announced on the second Division last night. The correct figure for the Noes was 302, not 295.

Madam Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reporting the facts to the House about a discrepancy that I understand came to light after the House rose. I also understand that the figure was informally corrected during the course of the night. The House will be grateful for the formal correction of the numbers declared in the House last night, and of course I shall ensure that the correct figure now appears in the Journal.

Hong Kong

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Anthony Coombs.]*

5.1 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): The opportunity for the House once again to consider Hong Kong and its future is welcome and it is important. It is welcome because the British and Hong Kong Governments can take much pride in what their policies—with support from all parts of the House—have achieved. It is important because we are entering the critical final phase of Hong Kong's 13-year transition.

Much is at stake for Britain, for China, for the wider Asian region, but above all and always for the nearly 6.25 million men, women and children who are proud to call Hong Kong their home. We have been glad to see in London this week their elected representatives—a Legislative Council delegation—who have ably and articulately conveyed their concerns to me, to ministerial colleagues and to many other friends of Hong Kong.

Hong Kong is special because of its geography, as a great maritime and now aeronautical hub on the southern coast of a nation of extraordinary potential and power. It is special because of its history as a British colony which was mercantile in its origins and achievements, but which became, especially in the years since the second world war, a beacon of political and economic hope to hundreds of thousands of immigrants, mostly from mainland China. It is special because of its economy, which bounced back from the dark days of war and, through three decades of uninterrupted growth, moved from making things to providing services. It is now one of the world's strongest and most free economies. And it is special because of its politics, past and present—special as a largely self-governing British dependent territory, and in future as a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China.

In just over 30 weeks from now, sovereignty will pass from the United Kingdom to China—a transition without parallel in modern history. Making a success of the handover is one of the Government's highest foreign policy priorities. In a moment, I will review the progress that we have made towards that goal, and the ground that we have still to cover. First, however, I want to describe two backdrops to our policy.

First, Hong Kong is—and will remain, now and after 30 June next year—central to Britain's relationship with China. Both countries have an overwhelming shared interest in a successful transition for Hong Kong. Hong Kong provides nearly two thirds of all foreign investment in China. About half of China's exports pass through Hong Kong. Much of the trade that does not physically enter the territory is financed or otherwise managed from there. With an economy roughly one fifth the size of China's, Hong Kong truly is China's gateway to the world. Economically now, as politically in future, China and Hong Kong are bound together.

For Britain, there is no realistic choice between our relationship with China and our responsibilities and interests in Hong Kong, now or after 1997. Our duty towards Hong Kong is best discharged—in fact, can only properly be discharged—in the framework of a sensible

[Mr. Malcolm Rifkind]

relationship with Peking. That is an important reason why, since becoming Foreign Secretary, I have had no fewer than four meetings with the Chinese Foreign Minister, Vice Premier Qian Qichen. It is also one reason why we were pleased to welcome to Britain last week Vice Premier Li Lanqing.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): No doubt the Secretary of State will have seen the letter from Martin Lee, chairman of the Democratic party of Hong Kong. When the right hon. and learned Gentleman met various senior Chinese politicians, did he make any mention of the fact that an appointed legislature violates the joint declaration?

Mr. Rifkind: I will come to question of the Legislative Council and the Chinese proposals on it later and I will deal with the hon. Gentleman's question then.

In May my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister met senior leaders in China, and in Peking this week my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Thatcher will also be seeing Chinese leaders. At all those meetings, Hong Kong is at the top of the agenda. The steadily increasing pace and range of exchanges between Britain and China has greatly helped in managing the agenda of the transition. It has also contributed to our wider objective of developing a closer political and commercial relationship with China as it resumes its historical position as one of the world's most important centres of power and civilisation.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware of the mounting concern felt not least in Hong Kong, but also here, about the way in which China continues to treat its dissidents? Only last week, a prominent dissident was gaoled for 11 years. Why did the Deputy Prime Minister not raise those issues even once when he went to China? Surely the Chinese can only be encouraged by our indifference to human rights.

Mr. Rifkind: Not for the first time, the hon. Gentleman makes an incorrect assumption. We raised the particular issue to which he referred with the Chinese Vice Premier when he visited London. I also raised the issue of human rights when I was last in China. The hon. Gentleman must inform himself before he makes inaccurate accusations. I know that it is not the first time that he has done so, but he should try harder in future.

The second backdrop to the past seven and a half months of the transition is what Hong Kong itself has achieved in the past 12 years. Hong Kong continually defies the predictions of the most irredeemable pessimists. Indeed, it often exceeds those of the most incorrigible optimists. Since 1984, Hong Kong's gross domestic product has almost doubled in real terms—to some £100 billion. Per capita GDP is now higher than that of many members of the European Union and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, including the United Kingdom. The trend rate of growth is a healthy 5 per cent., inflation is the lowest for nearly 10 years and unemployment, after soaring to 3.6 per cent. last year, is now back to 2.6 per cent. and falling. The Hang Seng index, which rose from around 1,000 in 1984 to 9,000 in 1995, is now approaching 13,000.

At the same time, the Hong Kong Government have taken giant steps to make social, educational and health provisions the envy of any OECD country. More than a million flats have been built in the past 20 years. Life expectancy is higher only in Japan. Child mortality is lower than in Germany, the United States or here. Crime is down—lower than a decade ago. A quarter of 18-year olds enter tertiary education—up from 3 per cent. in 1986.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that Hong Kong owes its great achievements to a successful education system, to the large numbers who enter higher education and to the Hong Kong people's sheer vitality in educational, intellectual and other spheres?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, I pay tribute to what has been achieved at the educational level, which has clearly had a profound impact on Hong Kong's success.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): The Foreign Secretary said that 1 million public dwellings have been constructed.

Mr. Rifkind: Flats.

Mr. MacShane: Yes. Does he believe that there is any connection between that programme and Hong Kong's low crime levels and stability? Could the United Kingdom learn any lessons from that policy?

Mr. Rifkind: A more likely explanation is the thriving market economy, the removal of trade barriers and the happy adoption of capitalist practice.

Such achievements have not stopped the Hong Kong Government cutting taxes to a swingeing 15 per cent. top rate of salary tax—which, incidentally, is paid by only 2 per cent. of the working population—raising public expenditure, but keeping it below 18 per cent. of gross domestic product, and increasing reserves, which next year will be worth about £25 billion.

We can compare that with the gloom and doom that was peddled at the time that the joint declaration was signed and with the pessimistic nonsense that appears from time to time in the international media. A business magazine's cover story last year forecasting the imminent death of Hong Kong has, to put it mildly, proved greatly exaggerated.

For all the anxieties that Hong Kong has faced in recent years, its Government have continued to govern triumphantly with a judicious light touch which has produced freedom and prosperity for millions. Hong Kong has not just lasted the course: it is entering the final lap of the transition at the top of its form. The Governor of Hong Kong would be the first to place the credit for that achievement where it belongs—with the men and women of Hong Kong. I know that the whole House will join me in paying tribute to their astonishing achievement at an extraordinary time for Hong Kong.

I also pay tribute to the vision and courage with which Chris Patten has steered Hong Kong through these difficult days. His decency and his determination to stand up for Hong Kong people at all times and in all places have won him admiration in Hong Kong and around the world. Who else would, or could, have done so much to

ensure that the last years of our stewardship of Hong Kong were conducted with dignity and honour? He is a Governor of whom we can be properly proud.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): If Governor Patten's work is so laudable, why do the Government not listen when he advises them to allow non-ethnic minorities to have British passports? He also sympathises with the ordinary Hong Kong people in their desire to possess passports—they do not necessarily want to come to Britain, but they need passports to leave the country. Is not the Foreign Secretary's speech so far filled with complacency?

Mr. Rifkind: No, I ask the hon. Gentleman to judge me by the whole of my remarks. I have concerns to express, and I shall come to them. However, we must put events in their proper context. There have been remarkable achievements in Hong Kong, such as the growth of the Hong Kong economy and that country's social achievements in the past few years when others predicted decline and depression. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that we must put that in context.

So much for the backdrops to what we are doing to secure as successful a transition for Hong Kong as we can. On the positive side of the joint liaison group's work, a remarkable amount has been achieved or is in prospect. For example, Britain and China have reached agreement about Hong Kong's continuing participation, in its own right, in some 30 international organisations ranging from the World Trade Organisation to the International Monetary Fund. Significant progress has been made towards ensuring that the 200 or so multilateral agreements that apply to Hong Kong now will continue to do so after the handover.

Work is well under way on preparing a full network of bilateral agreements between Hong Kong and third countries, covering everything from investment protection to air services. A programme to localise to Hong Kong some 150 United Kingdom Acts now extended to Hong Kong is nearly complete, as are preparations for implementing next July the agreement that Britain and China reached last year to establish in Hong Kong a Court of Final Appeal to take the place of the Privy Council. I also greatly welcome the agreement that was signed in Hong Kong yesterday confirming arrangements for the transfer of foreign exchange assets of almost £38 billion to the new Special Administrative Region Government.

That nexus of agreements—laws and treaties, rules and regulations, covering almost every sphere of human activity—reflects Britain's greatest legacy to Hong Kong: the rule of law and the level playing field. Everyone—in government or outside it—is equal before the law. The connection between Hong Kong people's rights and freedoms under law and their prosperity and stability is intimate and indissoluble. In a society of Hong Kong's sophistication, the rule of law is an essential ingredient of success—and it is Britain's most enduring contribution to that success.

Most importantly, Hong Kong's superlative civil service—led by Anson Chan—is in good heart. An impartial and efficient civil service is a key to Hong Kong's success. It is vital that civil servants continue to have confidence in Hong Kong's future and that there be maximum continuity throughout the transition. The signs are encouraging so far: morale is holding up well and wastage is low. China has given repeated and welcome assurances that it, too, favours continuity in an impartial civil service.

Britain and China are also making steady progress in another area of great concern to Hong Kong's people: passports and immigration. In January, Vice Premier Qian Qichen and I confirmed agreement on arrangements for issuing the new passport of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The passport has state-of-the-art security and meets the highest international standards. It will be quite distinct from passports issued by mainland China and its issue will be controlled exclusively by the Hong Kong immigration department. In March, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced that Britain would take the lead in granting visa-free access to holders of the new passport. We are now actively encouraging our partners in Europe and around the world to follow our lead.

Also in March, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced an important move to reinforce the assurances already given to the small solely British ethnic minority population in Hong Kong. He gave an absolute guarantee that those people would be granted admission to, and settlement in, the United Kingdom in the unlikely event of their coming under pressure to leave Hong Kong.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Everyone is grateful for my right hon. and learned Friend's assurances, which we take entirely on trust. However, if he can go that far, why can he not go one step further and provide real comfort to the people of Hong Kong?

Mr. Rifkind: I believe that they have real comfort. The position of that community in Hong Kong is secure. China's Basic Law for Hong Kong guarantees community members right of abode. Contrary to what is often claimed, no member will be left stateless: all will continue to hold British nationality. Community members have been given the specific assurance that, if pressured, they would have right of abode in the United Kingdom which would lead to their being able to claim full British citizenship.

In the economic sphere, Britain and China reached agreement earlier this year on the next stage in developing Hong Kong's great container port.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I wonder whether I heard the Foreign Secretary correctly. Did he say that that group will have the right of abode in Britain?

Mr. Rifkind: I repeated the Prime Minister's assurance: if members of that community come under pressure, they will be given the right to enter the United Kingdom. Once here, like anyone who is in this country lawfully, they will be able to claim full British citizenship.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): The Prime Minister's statement was certainly an advance on the Government's previous position. However, the Foreign Secretary will be aware that there is considerable confusion among the ethnic minority in Hong Kong as to what those exceptional circumstances might be. The Government

[Mr. Robin Cook]

have offered no definition in that regard. Will the Foreign Secretary tell the House in what circumstances the right of abode would be triggered?

Mr. Rifkind: We have said that if those people came under pressure—it is in their interests that we do not try to specify circumstances which must be hypothetical—if there was undue discrimination against such people, if they could not carry on their normal lives without unacceptable pressure being placed on them, and if there was activity which clearly demonstrated that they were being treated unreasonably and unacceptably, we would wish to honour the obligation that we announced. That is a source of additional security to the people concerned.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Does the Foreign Secretary realise that leaving the circumstances undeclared means that in the messy circumstances in which the problem would arise, some would want to come, but without a general declaration being made that would embarrass those who remained in Hong Kong? Only by making the position clear now can he straighten matters out.

Mr. Rifkind: I think that the hon. Gentleman is mistaken. If we spelt out in advance specific factors which would lead to our commitment being complied with, that would imply that any other form of pressure would be acceptable, or would not lead to any benefit to the individuals concerned. That would not be in their interests.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): I appreciate that this is a difficult situation, which my right hon. and learned Friend has addressed with great care. Does he recognise that we are at the end of a great chapter, and we seem to be getting caught up on the fate of 4,000 human beings, or possibly fewer, who in many cases have served Britain extremely well? It leaves an overall feeling—an aroma—of meanness that we cannot deal with them imaginatively and sensitively, as a former Home Office Minister said in the House the other day. In response to the feeling in all parts of the House, will he undertake that, with our right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, he will re-examine the matter and see whether a noble solution is possible to this small but important problem?

Mr. Rifkind: Of course I understand the concerns being expressed. They are shared by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and led him to give the unprecedented assurances which even the shadow spokesman confirmed and acknowledged a few moments ago.

Those people already have a right of abode in Hong Kong. They wish to remain in Hong Kong. If, contrary to the clear and unequivocal commitments given by the Chinese Government in the Basic Law, they were to come under pressure, they have already been given an explicit assurance that they would have the right to enter the United Kingdom. That would enable them in due course to acquire citizenship. I believe that that is a reasonable position.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): From the interventions from all parts of the House, the Secretary of State must recognise that if he moved in the direction that right hon. and hon. Members have been urging upon him, he would have the support of the whole House. The numbers involved are extremely small. If, as he says, the right of citizenship would ultimately be available as a result of the triggering of certain events, there cannot be any objection in principle to the right of citizenship. In those circumstances, why is that right not being extended now?

Mr. Rifkind: The right of citizenship to which I referred is available under existing law to anyone who lawfully enters the United Kingdom and has a lawful right to reside in the United Kingdom. That is quite a different situation. I should say in response to the hon. and learned Gentleman that of course I acknowledge that there are Members on both sides of the House who share his views, and there always have been—it is not a sudden new development. Those views have been expressed on previous occasions. Partly because of that, the Prime Minister gave the additional assurances which, although they did not go as far as some were advocating, were nevertheless warmly welcomed both in Hong Kong and here. That point has therefore been taken into account.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for giving way again, as he has had many interventions. I refer to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack). On a recent visit we met representatives of that group. Over the years, they have been devoted servants of the British cause—military, political, economic, private and commercial—and some of them would not wish to carry on living in Hong Kong indefinitely anyway. Will my right hon. and learned Friend reconsider the words "in due course" that he used in his last response but one? People may need the flexibility to make such decisions sooner than the Government expect, depending on how matters work out.

Mr. Rifkind: Of course I understand that many individuals have given good and valued service to the United Kingdom. That is true of many of the 6 million people of Hong Kong. I am delighted to acknowledge the fact that it has been true of many thousands—probably tens of thousands—of the people of Hong Kong over the years. It is not an exclusive feature of the group in question. Although in our judgment there is a secure position, we recognise that they also want a sense of security. That is why the Prime Minister gave the additional assurances of an unprecedented kind when he visited Hong Kong earlier this year.

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham) *rose—*

Mr. Rifkind: I will take one more intervention and then I must make progress.

Mr. Radice: Would the Government consider putting their assurance in writing to individual members of the ethnic minorities? That would at least be something in their hand.

Mr. Rifkind: If any individual would like such a written assurance, he or she has only to write to us and

we shall be happy to repeat it. It has all been well publicised, so no one can be in doubt, but if any individual wants such a written reply, I am happy to ensure that one is provided.

In the economic sphere, Britain and China reached agreement earlier this year on the next stage in developing Hong Kong's great container port—already the world's busiest. Twenty or more important contracts and franchises straddling the transition have been endorsed by the joint liaison group, ranging from tunnel management to mobile telephones.

There is progress, too, on another issue of great concern to Hong Kong people: the Vietnamese migrant population. We are working hard to achieve our aim of complete repatriation as soon as possible. Nearly 200,000 Vietnamese have arrived in Hong Kong since 1979. Some 11,000 remain. I was in Vietnam a couple of weeks ago and discussed the matter with senior leaders there. I was pleased by their willingness to help to tackle the outstanding problems in a positive and flexible manner.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): The letter circulated by the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), makes no reference to the fact that, among the 11,000, there are about 1,200 who are recognised as political refugees. What is the Government's attitude towards them?

Mr. Rifkind: There can be no question of the compulsory repatriation of people who are recognised to be refugees. The United Kingdom has already accepted 15,000 such refugees over the past few years. We are in discussion with several countries about granting admission to the remaining refugees, and I hope that we will be able to find places of refuge for them all. We recognise that that is an important objective.

Recently, the House has played its part in Hong Kong's transition. Two Acts of Parliament have this year been added to the statute book. Last month, a third Bill was given three Readings here and sent to another place. One Act provides for decent pension and retirement arrangements for members of Her Majesty's overseas civil service in Hong Kong, whether or not they choose to serve after the handover. I pay tribute to the part that members of that service have played and are playing in Hong Kong's success.

Another Act, fulfilling the pledge given by the Prime Minister, grants British citizenship to the wives and widows of those who fought in the defence of Hong Kong in the second world war. The third Bill provides for reasonable privileges and immunities for the economic and trade office, which we hope the Government of the Special Administrative Region will maintain in London after the handover.

Two other important matters have been resolved in recent months. First, Qian Qichen and I were able to reach agreement in New York in September on the principles for a suitably dignified joint handover ceremony on 30 June. That ceremony will be held in the convention centre extension to which I referred a moment ago. Officials of the two sides are now working on detailed arrangements for an event that is bound to command the attention of the world. I took the opportunity of my meeting with Qian Qichen to tell him that Britain planned to mount a simple farewell ceremony of its own on the Hong Kong waterfront earlier in the evening of 30 June.

The other matter settled between us was an agreement on the future British consulate-general in Hong Kong. Staff moved into the new building last month. I am pleased to tell the House that Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal will open the new building officially in January. It will be our largest consulate-general in the world, and larger than most of our embassies. There could be no more powerful symbol of our continuing commitment to Hong Kong.

The record of achievement under the auspices of the joint liaison group is, sadly, not the whole story. There are two vital areas in which wide differences between Britain and China remain, and where—I must tell the House frankly—the prospects for full or early agreement are not encouraging. I discussed these difficult issues with Members of the Legislative Council earlier this week.

The first is an area in which hon. Members have taken a close interest since the earliest debates on the joint declaration: the development of representative government. Our efforts to reach agreement with China, through 17 rounds of talks lasting most of 1993 on durable and mutually satisfactory arrangements, are well known. The details were described in the White Paper that my predecessor placed before the House in February 1994. Since then, elections have been held for all three tiers of representative government in Hong Kong on the basis of the legislation adopted by the Legislative Council in the spring and summer of 1994.

Those elections attracted turnouts unmatched in the history of Hong Kong. The representative bodies that they produced have performed their different roles—making laws, holding the Executive to account—with exemplary diligence and notable moderation. They have shown that no one, certainly not the incoming sovereign power, has anything to fear from the measured development of democratic government that we have set in train well within the parameters of the joint declaration and the Basic Law.

Despite that, and despite the clear wish of the Hong Kong community for duly elected Members of the present Legislative Council to complete their natural four-year term, China seems determined to appoint, perhaps as early as next month, some sort of provisional legislature. We continue to make it clear to the Chinese, in public and in private, at every level, that their planned provisional legislature is neither desirable nor necessary. It is not necessary because there is nothing that it can do that should not more properly be done by others before the handover; it is not desirable because Hong Kong already has a duly elected Legislative Council which should be allowed to continue its work, and because a provisional legislature running in parallel with the constitutional Legislative Council risks creating confusion and uncertainty when they are least needed.

We have told the Chinese that we see no justification for the establishment of a provisional legislature. Neither the joint declaration nor the Basic Law makes any mention of such a body. China will have to explain to Hong Kong and the world why it chose to replace a body for which more than a million Hong Kong people voted with one chosen by a hand-picked electorate of 400. I call most sincerely on China to address the anxieties that these plans are creating; to think through the full political consequences of building this legislative edifice on such shaky foundations.

[Mr. Rifkind]

Exactly how the British and Hong Kong Governments react to the establishment of the provisional legislature depends on what it purports to do and when. Its establishment and operation as a parallel legislature before the handover would seriously call into question China's commitment to its obligations under the joint declaration, but this will be more than a legal debating point. It raises much more fundamental political questions about China's willingness to follow its own principle, enshrined in the joint declaration and the Basic Law, of

"Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong".

I see no benefit in saying more on this difficult and sensitive issue now, beyond encouraging hon. Members and Hong Kong's friends outside it to do all they can in the months ahead to encourage China, in a spirit of well-intentioned advice, to act in this area with all possible prudence.

Mr. Tony Banks: I cannot believe what the Foreign Secretary is saying. He cannot be surprised that an authoritarian Government such as Peking are acting as they are. The joint declaration is an internationally recognised agreement. We were told that in the House in the debate on 5 December 1984, and an elected legislative chamber was part of that international agreement. What is the Foreign Secretary saying? Is he saying that we should not say anything more? On 11 December this year, the Chinese will set up an appointed body. He must protest about that now, and if they set it up, go to the United Nations and register a complaint. There is an international agreement, and it is about to be breached.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is getting terribly excited, because he appears to agree with what I have just been saying to the House. I am not quite sure what he is trying to convey. If it is genuine frustration and anger at what might happen, that is shared by the Government and the people of Hong Kong. He must not get overexcited. The legislature has not yet been set up. The time to come to a view about what will happen will be in the event that China acts in a way that could be inconsistent with its commitments under the joint declaration. I know that the hon. Gentleman's views and concerns are widely shared on both sides of the House. That is a point about which I should not have had to remind him.

Sir Colin Shepherd (Hereford): My right hon. and learned Friend knows full well the high regard in which the Legislative Council is held in Hong Kong and, indeed, far wider, not least throughout the Commonwealth. Do his Chinese counterparts accept that if they go along the line of this appointed council, they will in effect have repudiated the Basic Law that they agreed, which quite clearly sets out that there shall be a Legislative Council in Hong Kong elected by universal suffrage?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend makes a very powerful point. Neither the joint declaration nor the Basic Law provides for a provisional legislature, if that is the right word—it is not—elected by a pre-appointed committee of some 400 people. It clearly does not represent a genuine Parliament and it can in no way be compared with the genuine democratic expression of Hong Kong opinion as represented by the present Legislative Council.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I do not think that there is much use in appealing to the good nature of the Chinese authorities, but it should be pointed out to them—I am sure that it has been already—that the appointment of a provisional legislature with the power to pass laws in Hong Kong would be very damaging indeed to the rule of law in the territory and to the confidence of investors in Hong Kong. Chinese commercial and economic interests will be damaged if they pursue that course. Surely the Chinese understand that, if they start mucking about with elected government in the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong, the possibility and prospect of their ever enticing Taiwan into some different and closer relationship will be gone.

Mr. Rifkind: The right hon. Gentleman makes two very powerful points that I entirely endorse. The Chinese have tried to reassure public opinion by saying that, if they set up a provisional legislature, it will not seek to compete with the existing LegCo but simply prepare for what might happen after 30 June. I find that a very unconvincing response because if two bodies exist simultaneously—one a properly elected Legislative Council, the other purporting to be a provisional legislature—at the very least that will be a recipe for confusion, and it will damage confidence and in no way benefit the people of Hong Kong either directly or indirectly.

Mr. Dykes: Bearing in mind the fact that there is an interesting comparison between the monarch—one person—appointing the Governor on the advice of Ministers, and 400 names, selected on a wide basis one hopes, choosing the chief executive, does my right hon. and learned Friend expect there to be an enormous amount of comfort if the People's Republic of China authorities, with the new Special Administrative Region system, ensure that the provisional legislature comprises a large number of LegCo Members?

Mr. Rifkind: If that is what they are going to do, the much better solution would be to continue with the existing LegCo, because that is the body that has the democratic legitimacy. It has been properly elected. We urge the Chinese authorities to involve those who have the support of the people of Hong Kong, such as the Democratic party of Hong Kong and others—all the parties. We hope that anyone who has been elected by the people of Hong Kong will be fully involved in the public affairs of Hong Kong after the transition. That would make a major contribution to the confidence of the territory.

Mr. Rowlands: What hope does the Foreign Secretary have of our partners in Europe joining us in conveying the strength of feeling that he has expressed from the Dispatch Box?

Mr. Rifkind: That is an important point. As one would expect, we have been speaking to many countries. I am delighted that a large number of countries are making it clear to China that the welfare, freedom and way of life

of the people of Hong Kong is of importance not just to the people of Hong Kong or to the people of the United Kingdom, but to the international community as a whole. The United States, France, Japan, Australia and many other countries have recently made that point clearly and unambiguously to the Chinese authorities, and we hope that China will recognise that the world will be watching what is happening in Hong Kong after 30 June 1997.

Any action that denies to the people of Hong Kong the best opportunity to maintain their freedom and way of life will gravely damage not only Hong Kong, but China's reputation. I believe that China has much to lose if Hong Kong's interests and welfare are damaged, and that there are good reasons for China to reflect on what may be its current intentions.

Mr. Tim Renton (Mid–Sussex): I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for giving way again. I wish to ask about a very important subject: the other so-called election—the election of the chief executive. The choice of chief executive will be extremely important to the people of Hong Kong, and the Chinese have made a great deal of fuss about the fact that he or she will be elected rather than chosen by a Government in London. The committee composed of the 400 people who have been chosen so far—although 5,700 Hong Kong people put forward names—is dominated by representatives of the pro-Peking parties. There are only two mild critics of Chinese policy on it. Does my right hon. and learned Friend share that opinion?

Mr. Rifkind: I should make two points in response to my right hon. Friend's intervention. First, like him, I am not hugely impressed by the suggestion that the chief executive will be elected. I think that we can confidently assume that the chief executive will be selected by the Chinese Government, even if the choice is formally endorsed in the manner that he mentioned.

Secondly, I am slightly more optimistic about the likelihood of an appropriate person being chosen. I have been impressed by the extent to which the Chinese Government have emphasised that they recognise that the choice of chief executive will be crucial to the continuing confidence of the civil service and people of Hong Kong. I believe that there is an extremely good prospect of the Chinese Government being sensitive to that matter, and that—although we may have doubts about the procedure being used—there is at least a good chance that a person will be chosen on the basis of the need to ensure confidence in Hong Kong and how best to achieve it. We must wait to see, but that is my judgment now.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Perhaps the Foreign Secretary would care to explain to the House why the through-train arrangement was aborted, and, of course, who aborted it.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is right to imply, as I think he is implying, that the Chinese Government declined to continue with the through-train approach.

Mr. Faulds: Why?

Mr. Rifkind: It is quite clear why: because we had insisted on the introduction of proper democratic and representative institutions. The Chinese Government have acknowledged that that is why they believe it is no longer possible to continue with that approach.

Mr. Faulds: The Foreign Secretary really cannot get away with that. That was part of the Basic Law and the joint agreement, and to pretend that that was not so is somewhat dishonest. He knows perfectly well, as we all do who know about these matters—apparently very few do—that the one who aborted the through-train arrangement was Governor Patten.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is entitled to his point of view, but I do not think that it is shared by the vast majority of hon. Members on both sides of the House, or by the people of Hong Kong.

The second sphere in which agreement has proved elusive is that of future human rights safeguards in Hong Kong. Hong Kong people are anxious—understandably—about whether the guarantees given in the joint declaration and the Basic Law will be honoured, in letter and spirit, after the handover. They need reassurance, and only China can provide that reassurance.

Sadly, such reassurance has not always been forthcoming. I have referred in the House to our concern at remarks that the Chinese Foreign Minister was reported to have made to *The Asian Wall Street Journal* last month—remarks which suggested that the guarantees of freedom of the press and of assembly, given by China in the joint declaration and the Basic Law, might somehow be constrained in ways not prescribed by law. We have urged the Chinese Government at the highest level to offer reassurance on that front. More is needed if the Hong Kong people's anxieties are to be allayed.

Mr. MacShane: I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for allowing me to intervene a second time. In fact, the British can do something—place those issues on the agenda of the United Nations human rights committee in Geneva. China is extraordinarily sensitive to any direct threat or proposal to place such issues on the agenda of an international body. Between now and June, will the Government consider doing that?

Mr. Rifkind: We are very willing to take any measure that, in our judgment, will contribute towards enhancing the prospect of the people of Hong Kong's human rights being observed. That is the only criterion that we will apply in deciding whether to pursue the option suggested by the hon. Gentleman, or to take a different approach. If that option strengthens the prospects of human rights being observed in Hong Kong, we will take it; if it does not, we will not be able to—but that is the criterion we will apply.

Hong Kong people have been further alarmed by the sentencing of the Chinese dissident, Mr. Wang Dan, to 11 years' imprisonment, apparently for behaviour which, as the Governor rightly pointed out, would not even have been illegal in Hong Kong or in most other countries. Again I urge the Chinese authorities to have regard to the concerns of their Hong Kong compatriots—and, indeed, of the House.

[Mr. Rifkind]

In similar vein, we are continuing to press China to make it clear how, after the handover, it intends to fulfil the requirement to report on the implementation in Hong Kong of the two international human rights covenants. Under the joint declaration, the provisions of the covenants as applied to Hong Kong will remain in force in Hong Kong. The UN human rights committee has said that it hopes and expects reports still to be made on Hong Kong after the handover.

By far the easiest way to resolve that difficulty is for China to accede to the two covenants, which I urge China to do without delay. On that and other issues, I urge Chinese officials, when they visit Hong Kong tomorrow, and in the months ahead, to listen to the voices of Hong Kong people. They have done so in the past and responded in welcome fashion, and I am sure that they can do so again.

More encouragingly, however, China has so far taken no further action on earlier proposals from an advisory group to water down Hong Kong's Bill of Rights and to make consequential changes to six other laws. I hope that that matter will be left for the people of Hong Kong and their future Government to decide.

For the next few weeks in Hong Kong, the main preoccupation will be choosing the first chief executive and his team. The importance of that choice for the future in Hong Kong cannot be overstated. The entire Hong Kong community, the civil service—on which so much depends—and the international community will be looking to the selection committee and to China to make a choice that commands the confidence of Hong Kong people. At this most sensitive time in its history, Hong Kong needs someone to provide leadership, on the basis of the principles set down in the joint declaration and the Basic Law.

The latest signs are that the appointment of the chief executive will be confirmed by the middle of next month. The Governor and the Hong Kong Government have made it clear that they stand by their commitment to give the chief executive every assistance. We are determined to work with him—whoever is chosen—in the interests of Hong Kong and of a successful transition.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): If my right hon. and learned Friend is coming to the end of his speech, may I ask him to pause and tell us whether he has noted, as I have noted, that this may be an historic occasion—the last occasion on which the House debates the future of a major British colony? This is the last of the debates—conducted over perhaps half a millennium—that have affected the fate of millions of people around the world. Before he finishes his speech, and hauls down the flag on the empire, will he pay tribute to the many men and women who created something that was special, not only in its extent, but as a great example in world history of good government and justice?

Mr. Rifkind: I will very willingly do that. I believe that the people of Britain—of the entire United Kingdom—can have a deep sense of pride in what the British empire has achieved. The provision of the rule of law and democratic government, and a massive increase in prosperity for all the territories, was an historic achievement. The fact that we now have a Commonwealth of nations—with more than 51 member countries with historic links with the United Kingdom, which they wish to maintain—is clear evidence that there is a deep sense of common values that are of great importance in those countries and in the United Kingdom.

I find it significant that India, for example, has invited Her Majesty the Queen as a state visitor in the year in which it will celebrate the 50th anniversary of its independence. That is further evidence of the fact that the achievements of our empire, to which I pay tribute, are valued around the world.

Mr. David Howell: I do not want to contradict such splendid sentiments, but I very much hope that this is not the last time that the House will debate Hong Kong. I hope that we have a major monitoring role to play and that we shall keep a sharp eye on the human rights and conditions of the people of Hong Kong in the future. Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure us that if, even at the level of the United Nations, things do not turn out the way we hope, and even if the Government are not able to intervene as we would like in checking on what is happening, the House can play an effective part in ensuring that Hong Kong remains a place of liberty?

Mr. Rifkind: My right hon. Friend is quite right. We should also remember that the welfare of the people of Gibraltar, the Falklands and a number of other smaller territories still lies with the Government of this country. Their welfare is very much our responsibility.

I hope that I have shown this afternoon something of what is at stake in a successful transition for Hong Kong. Success for Hong Kong matters, not just for the territory and its people, not just for Britain with its huge and continuing political, ethical and economic commitment to the territory, and not just for China, the incoming sovereign power to which the world is looking for reassurance, but for all those with an interest in China and its future engagement with the wider world.

The whole international community has a stake in a successful Hong Kong. Its representatives will be there, at the midnight stroke next June, as Britain's and China's guests at the handover ceremonies. Afterwards, as the years unfold, the world will watch how China discharges the responsibilities it then assumes for Hong Kong and fulfils the promises made in the joint declaration.

For their part, the British Government are determined, as the Prime Minister told the people of Hong Kong in March this year, that

"Hong Kong will never have to walk alone".

In June next year, our relationship with Hong Kong will change, but it most emphatically will not end. Our interests and our obligations will continue, in this century and on into the next.

The solemn promises that China made to us in the joint declaration—a binding treaty registered at the United Nations—remain in force for at least half a century. The Sino-British joint liaison group, through which Britain and China consult on implementing the joint declaration, will continue until 1 January 2000. Our political and ethical responsibilities towards Hong Kong and its people will stand long thereafter.

Some 3.5 million Hong Kong people have British passports now, and will continue to have them. Our exports of goods to Hong Kong—our second largest

market in Asia—are worth nearly £3 billion. A growing proportion—nearly half at the last count—of our exports to China pass through Hong Kong. British investment in Hong Kong amounts to as much as £70 billion. One thousand British companies based in Hong Kong operate from there into China and across the Asia-Pacific region. British sovereignty may end—will end—on 30 June; British commitment will not.

I hope that the House will continue to take the closest possible interest in the affairs of Hong Kong and its people. The Government remain ready and willing to bring before the House developments in a territory with which this country has had a close and fruitful association for a century and a half. We must all do all we can to ensure that the partnership continues and that Hong Kong people receive the support and commitment they deserve—and which we owe them—as they embark on the next stage of their remarkable journey.

5.53 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I think that the Foreign Secretary will acknowledge that the Opposition did press for this debate. It is more than a year since we held a debate on Hong Kong, and it is now less than a year—indeed, it is barely 200 days—before the transfer of sovereignty to China. That transfer is not only a formal diplomatic exercise between two Governments; it is an exercise with a major human element to it.

The great majority of people in Hong Kong look forward to the transfer with some anxiety and concern. The population of Hong Kong is greater than that of Scotland. Half of the people are British nationals, albeit British nationals of overseas territories. We have a responsibility to them and to all the residents of Hong Kong to ensure that we leave behind the best possible assurance and guarantee for their rights, their safety, their quality of life and their ability to pursue their economic interests with the extraordinary success that they have achieved over the past five decades.

The Foreign Secretary will be aware that I visited Hong Kong earlier this year. Like every visitor to the colony, I was immensely impressed by its staggering economic achievement, its prosperity, dynamism and innovation, which are all the more remarkable when one reflects on the fact that they have been achieved in an area crammed into tiny, inconvenient parcels of land, an area that has to import almost half its water supply and which has no natural resources other than the talents of the people, of whom, at the end of the war only 50 years ago, there were only 500,000.

The visible evidence of the success can be seen at the dockside, in the ranks of containers crammed with high-tech goods, and in the financial houses which provide the majority of investment that goes into the economy of mainland China. To mention a topic of which all hon. Members will acknowledge that I have extensive experience and on which I can speak with authority, Hong Kong has not just one but two of the most modern and best-attended race courses that I have ever visited. From bitter experience, I am sorry to report that the percentage chance of a return on a bet is no higher than on this side of the globe.

Hong Kong's success is very much its own distinctive achievement. I caution hon. Members against attempting to conscript the Hong Kong economy into supporting their own fixed political prejudices. The most obvious feature of Government policy in Hong Kong at present is an increase in public spending, so much so that the communist Government of China have complained that we shall not leave behind a big enough budget surplus.

To some extent, I can share the Foreign Secretary's praise of Governor Chris Patten. The programme that he has pursued in Hong Kong could be written as an illustration in a textbook of social democracy. In his time there, he has provided more than 2,000 more teachers, cutting class sizes in primary schools to only 24. He has added 4,000 more hospital beds, and cut the waiting times at accident and emergency departments to a maximum of 30 minutes. He has built 100 new public sector flats every day that he has been there—he has been very busy—and expanded the number of people eligible for welfare benefits. Those policies have made him so widely popular that he achieves a popularity rating double that of the British Government, who may wish to ponder the connection between such policies and popularity.

Mr. Rifkind: Perhaps it has something to do with being able to achieve all that thanks to a top rate of tax of 15 per cent. and thanks to public expenditure being only 18 per cent. of gross domestic product.

Mr. Cook: The Foreign Secretary has to acknowledge that that spending and that tax rate are a function of the growth in the economy. It would be extremely unwise to suggest that the growth in the economy is a function of that tax rate.

In addition, Governor Patten has made sure that there is a balance between an increase in public welfare and the availability of tax reductions to those who are in need of them. We only wish that the same balanced judgment had been exercised in Britain by this Government. *[Interruption.]* I do not wish to turn this into a long debate on political, or other, influences. I was warning hon. Members not to conscript the conditions in Hong Kong in support of their prejudices, and I urge the Foreign Secretary to be careful what he is laughing at.

Dr. Bray: I caution my right hon. Friend about going too far in that direction, because the financial position of the Hong Kong Government is greatly eased by the public ownership of land.

Mr. Cook: It has to be said that privatisation in Hong Kong has essentially involved the sale of land—some to people who may be candidates for Chief Minister.

Having contemplated the popularity of Governor Patten, I wonder whether it is wise for him to plot a return to British politics. He has built a level of popularity in Hong Kong that he can never match as leader of the Conservative party in this country. However, his conduct of diplomacy with China has achieved a lack of agreement in inverse proportion to the popularity of his domestic policies.

Our most recent debate on the issue was under the title "China and Hong Kong". The title for today's debate is simply "Hong Kong", but, as the House knows, it is impossible to discuss Hong Kong without talking about China. The industrial growth of China is one of the seven wonders of the world economy. Those who have visited Shanghai will know that it is less a city than an immense,

[Mr. Cook]

sprawling construction site. I understand that 40 per cent. of the large construction cranes in the world are in Shanghai.

The exponential growth of China's economy is bound to force some accommodation on its political structures. The largest dimension to the political debate in China is the amount of autonomy to be accorded to the provinces, against a background of differential growth and the need for different provinces to pursue distinctive economic policies.

There is also a healthy and relatively open debate in China about the impact on the environment of industrial growth. In the one large successful demonstration to have been held independently in Tiananmen square since the events of 1989, several thousand students took to the square with candles as a vigil to the threat from logging to China's golden monkeys.

These developments are positive, but none of them should obscure the fact that China's modern, dynamic economy is paralleled by a very unmodern and static attitude to human rights. I do not think that those two features of Chinese society can co-exist indefinitely. In a high-tech industrial environment that promotes a culture of innovation, initiative and information exchange among its work force, the Government cannot expect the people to submit to political structures under which they have no opportunity to contribute their opinions.

That tension is particularly pointed in the case of one victim of Chinese Government policy, which I raised when I was in Beijing—that of the Hong Kong financial journalist Xi Yang, who has been imprisoned for 12 years on a charge of stealing state secrets. Nobody knows what the state secrets were, because the charge is not specific, but it is widely believed that it referred to an article in which he disclosed the size of China's foreign reserves.

It is plainly impossible to imagine that the growth of the financial sector in Shanghai, with its multi-storey stock exchange, can continue to exist side by side with a political structure that imprisons people for publishing the central reserves. As China plunges into the era of the fibre-optic cable, the modem, e-mail and the fax, the control of knowledge and power by the central authority in Beijing will become increasingly hard to maintain.

That is why my conclusion is that, to foster political change in China, the most sensible course is to embrace China into contact with the modern world and the influence of the global economy. Any strategy based on the exclusion of China may well create the only circumstances in which the hardliners can retain power.

In the meantime, it is only too easy to understand the unease caused in Hong Kong by the transfer to China, with its current political structures. It has created heavy anxiety about what Chinese rule might mean for the Hong Kong way of life.

Mr. Winnick: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the 11-year sentence given to a dissident last week is causing mounting concern in Hong Kong? Although the Foreign Secretary got hot under the collar when I put the issue to him, because he does not like criticism, is it not a fact that the Deputy Prime Minister did not raise the issue of human rights when he went to China? When pressed on that on his return, he simply responded that the Chinese knew the views of the British Government. Should he not have raised the issue? Should not every opportunity be taken to raise with the Chinese the violations of basic human rights that they are conducting day in and day out?

Mr. Cook: I was not present when the Deputy Prime Minister visited Beijing, but I noticed that, in his response to my hon. Friend's earlier intervention, the Foreign Secretary did not confirm that the Deputy Prime Minister had raised human rights cases in person.

I agree that all senior political figures have a duty to ensure that, at every discussion with the Chinese leadership, we raise our legitimate concerns about the need for China, as an important member of the United Nations, to match the standards on human rights expected of United Nations members. At separate meetings, my right hon. Friend the leader of the Labour party and I have raised the same three cases of victims of human rights abuses in China. I am pleased to say that one of those three has now been released on compassionate grounds.

Mr. Dykes: Given that there are many anxieties about human rights, in China and in other countries, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the process would be helped if the leading world power—the United States—had an even-handed view on such matters in all countries and did not take selective examples from one country, notwithstanding the fact that the People's Republic of China is the largest country in the world?

For example, the United States' attitude to Saudi Arabia, which has 9 million people and carried out 420 beheadings last year, mostly for economic crimes, is very different from its attitude to the People's Republic of China. Would it not be better for the United States and other western democracies to adopt an even-handed attitude to all such problems throughout the world?

Mr. Cook: I am slightly reluctant to get myself into great difficulty, while we are trying to resolve the issue of Hong Kong and China, by pursuing the case of Saudi Arabia. However, I entirely endorse the basic thrust of the hon. Gentleman's observation, that it is the legitimate concern of the international community to ensure that the same minimum standards on human rights are observed by all members of the United Nations. It is no offence to China to suggest that it should match those obligations, because China, quite rightly and properly, is entitled to a senior place at the United Nations. It must accept the obligations that go with such membership.

I was about the refer to the heavy anxiety in Hong Kong over the impact on its way of life caused by the transfer of sovereignty. The people of Hong Kong have tasted democracy. It has happened rather late in the day under British rule, it must be admitted, but they have tasted it. They do not want that taste to become a memory.

As hon. Members who have been there will know, the Hong Kong press are vigorous, and their system is firmly based on freedom of expression. They want to ensure that that can continue. Although I am slightly disappointed by the Hong Kong business community's lack of candour in public, in private it shares concerns that the basis of its successful business enterprise should continue.

I have visited Beijing and discussed these points with the Chinese leadership. It is clear to me from those conversations that they want Hong Kong to succeed as a

business centre. They have everything to gain from that. Hong Kong accounts for 20 per cent. of China's GDP. It provides most of the inward investment into mainland China. Some 3 million workers in mainland China are employed by Hong Kong firms. Hong Kong provides China with the gateway to the global economy. Based on vehicle movements, the crossover point between China and Hong Kong is the second busiest in the world—second only to the border between the United States and Mexico.

All those factors give China every reason to want Hong Kong's business prosperity to continue, but that can be achieved only if the Chinese Government recognise that that success is built on the foundations of a civic society that includes the rule of law, freedom of information and expression, respect for the freedoms of the individual, and a recognition that political and economic freedoms are indivisible.

Sir Colin Shepherd: Did the right hon. Gentleman get the impression from his discussions in Beijing that that essential point was understood by the Chinese?

Mr. Cook: Those with whom I have had discussions recognise that the rule of law is important, and understand many of the points that I have made about that being one ingredient of the commercial success of Hong Kong. That is why, a year ago, one Chinese leader produced the celebrated metaphor of the teapot that will give them the right flavour of tea only if they do not scrub it out too clean when they get it in their hands.

I think that there must be some nervousness about whether the Chinese Government have enough experience of operating in that environment to respect the nuances that make that environment such a success. That is why it is so important that we leave in place legal and political structures which will protect the freedoms of the people of Hong Kong; and that those structures be entrenched so that they can survive after we go.

Time is now running out. The Foreign Secretary gave us a resumé of the history of negotiations, going back to 1984. Lady Thatcher can quite properly claim parentage of the 1984 joint declaration. Some of the difficulties that we have encountered in the negotiations since 1984 are due to the central ambiguity in that declaration, which left China with the clear impression that, in 1997, it was going to receive Hong Kong as it was in 1984. China was encouraged in that belief by references in the joint declaration to the system remaining unchanged. The United Kingdom, rightly and properly, has maintained that Hong Kong could not be preserved in ice for 13 years, and that, after the events of Tiananmen square, there was powerful pressure for change.

Our case for the legitimate legal basis of such change has been partly clouded by different interpretations of what was meant in the joint declaration. It is certainly fitting that Lady Thatcher should intend to be present on 30 June to witness the fruits of her handiwork. It is a fact of political life that this Foreign Secretary may not be there on 30 June as the representative of the British Government—I do not wish to speculate, but it is a possibility.

May I therefore, for the avoidance of doubt, record the fact that, if there is an election here before 30 June—I hope that that is a fairly safe speculation—and if it does lead to a change of Government, there will be no change of policy on the transfer of Hong Kong? There will be no time for even the most modest change. Even the handover ceremony has already been negotiated, down to the precise hour at which Governor Patten boards Britannia and sails off into the sunset.

If it should happen that the Government leave office before the handover ceremony, they cannot leave behind their responsibility for what they have left in place. We shall indeed hold them responsible for that arrangement, and, in the pursuit of holding them responsible, there will be two areas of unfinished business which the House would expect them to resolve over the coming months.

I intend to raise a number of questions as I discuss those two items of unfinished business. If they cannot be answered in the course of this debate, I issue an open invitation to both Ministers who are present to write to me with the answers once they have had time to reflect. Nevertheless, the questions I want to ask are questions to which both I and the House are entitled to answers.

The first area of unfinished business relates to the Legislative Council, about which there were several exchanges while the Foreign Secretary was speaking. The joint declaration and the Basic Law envisaged a through train for the Legislative Council, elected under British sovereignty, which would continue to serve after transfer to Chinese sovereignty. That through train was important as a symbol of continuity, and also as a demonstration that democratic institutions would survive the transfer of sovereignty. No issue, however, has contributed more to the gulf between Governor Patten and the Chinese Government than the conduct of negotiations on LegCo.

Governor Patten announced his arrangements for the new LegCo before he had ever visited Beijing. When Beijing refused to agree to those proposals, he proceeded without Beijing's agreement. Having discussed the history of these matters with people in Hong Kong, I surmise that a calculated gamble was taken. The idea was that, if Governor Patten forged ahead with the changes for the new LegCo, China would eventually be forced to come along in the slipstream.

The Foreign Secretary will be aware that a succession of former ambassadors to China have expressed their anxiety that that was a naive misreading of Chinese political reality. Their misgivings have proved correct. China has persisted in refusing to recognise a LegCo the arrangements for which were not negotiated with China, and the Chinese are now insisting on derailing the through train.

One reason why China holds strong views on this point is that the Chinese believed that they already had an agreement on the basis for elections to the Legislative Council, and that that agreement was enshrined in letters exchanged between the Government of China and the Foreign Secretary's predecessor, the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd). Those letters were exchanged in January and February of 1990, and set out the basis for the election of functional Members by an electoral college of 800 people. Those arrangements were then superseded in October 1992 by Governor Patten's proposal to increase the number of functional Members, and to have them directly elected by individuals.

[Mr. Cook]

I want to ask the Foreign Secretary a direct question: were the letters exchanged between the Government of China and the right hon. Member for Witney shown to Governor Patten before he announced quite different arrangements? If they were shown to him, why did he repudiate them without warning Beijing? If they were not shown to him, how can the Foreign Office excuse its failure to share with the Governor, at a time when it knew that he was working on arrangements for LegCo, the exchanges of letters that it had had on this very point with the Government of China?

Meanwhile, it is the people of Hong Kong who face the consequences of the failure of the gamble. China intends to appoint a provisional Legislative Council; "appoint" is the correct term—there is a committee of selection, but the committee of selection is in turn selected by the Government of China. In the one vote that has been held so far, the appointees were split 399 to 1, which hardly argues for an immense plurality of views in the committee of selection.

There is no provision in the joint declaration or the Basic Law for the Government of China to appoint a provisional LegCo. The Foreign Secretary was eloquent in denouncing China's intention to appoint one. China should be left in no doubt that that denunciation is fully endorsed by all parties in this Chamber.

But the House did not need to hear from the Foreign Secretary that China was wrong to take such a step. What the House needed to hear from him was what the Government are going to do if China does take the step. If I understood the Foreign Secretary's response to interventions correctly, he suggested that it was not yet clear that this will happen. I do not think it could be clearer. The Government of China have even set out the timetable in which it is going to happen. By 21 December, selection of the new provisional LegCo will have been completed.

So when we reach the winding-up speeches today, the House, I think, will be entitled to hear from the Minister who replies not more denunciations of what China intends to do, but a clear statement of the Government's strategy for when China carries out what it has clearly said it intends to do.

After all, if there was indeed a gamble that China would follow in the slipstream of Governor Patten's statement, there must have been a contingency plan for the eventuality that the gamble might fail. What was it? Is it really true that the Government have come this far without knowing what they intend to do if the Chinese persist in what they have made it perfectly plain they intend to do?

Should China appoint this provisional LegCo, it will damage not just the rights of the people of Hong Kong but China's image in the world. During my discussions in Beijing, I got the clear impression that China's leaders have not yet grasped that the removal of the elected LegCo on the night of the handover of sovereignty will dominate international reporting of the event. That will certainly damage China's image abroad; but it will also damage the British Government's reputation and the reputation of this House, because it will provide embarrassingly visible evidence that we have failed to secure arrangements that made sure that democracy was entrenched once we left Hong Kong.

Mr. David Howell: I wholly agree with what the right hon. Gentleman is saying, and have much sympathy with the way in which he is putting it, but is not the situation even worse than his description? The body will exist, will apparently meet in the territory, and will even examine laws, amendments and reforms. So we will have a sort of crazy dual system, a parallel legislature, which puts a torpedo through the usual concepts of the rule of law.

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. The Government of China have already—to be fair to them, they are always clear about their intentions—made it perfectly clear that they cannot accept the Bill of Rights ordinance, and intend to bring forward proposals to amend it. I believe that it would be doubly unsatisfactory if such measures were brought before an appointed Legislative Council.

If it is indeed China's view that the Bill of Rights ordinance must be revisited, it should not do so until it has carried out its commitment for fresh elections to a new LegCo under Chinese sovereignty. If a provisional LegCo is appointed, the work should be confined to making arrangements for those elections. Although that would be a welcome limitation if we could obtain it, it does not undermine the essential principle that a Legislative Council elected by the people of Hong Kong will have been replaced by a provisional Legislative Council appointed by the Government of China.

Mr. Rowlands: Further to the point that the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) has just made, is there not a rather worse dilemma, in that many of the Legislative Council's Members are having to make up their minds whether they should try to apply for the new provisional legislature? That could also be quite destabilising to the Legislative Council's work during this very important period.

Mr. Cook: It is very important that it is clear that there can be only one functioning authoritative Legislative Council up until 30 June. It is welcome that the Government of China have given a clear commitment that the provisional Legislative Council will not be taking decisions as such until after 30 June. Nevertheless, my hon. Friend raises a very serious issue.

My understanding is that barely half the Legislative Council's Members are already willing to accept nominations to the provisional Legislative Council. That inevitably means that that membership will be unrepresentative of those who were elected in very recent elections, and demonstrates the substantial hostility in Hong Kong to the procedure.

I said that there were two issues of unfinished business. The other to which I turn is the unresolved nationality question concerning the Asian residents of Hong Kong, which was extensively raised by the Foreign Secretary. That small community and its descendants are not able to obtain Chinese citizenship, because it remains confined to ethnic Chinese. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) therefore referred to them, as they are sometimes referred to in a Hong Kong debate, as "non-ethnics", although I have some difficulty handling the concept that anybody can be a "non-ethnic".

It is not surprising that many in the Asian community in Hong Kong have been left insecure about their future under Chinese sovereignty. The community is small in number—probably under 10,000 in total—and consists overwhelmingly of professional and business people. Many of them run family businesses with substantial capital. If they were ever to come to Britain, they would be exactly the people who provide a boost to our prosperity and jobs. If they were given the right to come here, it is probable that many would not do so, but might invest in building a business in Britain to provide themselves with assets here if they ever had to leave Hong Kong.

Earlier in the year, as the Foreign Secretary advised the House, the Prime Minister gave those in the Asian community an assurance that a Conservative Government would admit them to Britain if exceptional circumstances arose that required them to leave. That raises as many questions as it answers. What are those exceptional circumstances? Do they have to apply to the whole community or just to the individual who is applying? I was left in some doubt as to which one was so by the Foreign Secretary's answer. How long would those people have to wait in exceptional circumstances until their case was accepted?

As the Foreign Secretary will know, the Labour party has written to the Prime Minister urging him to extend British citizenship now to that small group of people. Such a step would honour our obligation to them, because of their past contribution to our colony, and remove any uncertainty about their rights in future. I assured the Government that Labour would co-operate in facilitating the passage of such legislation. I repeat that offer.

If, however, Ministers will not take up the offer of co-operation from us, I ask them for their co-operation. I have consulted my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), our shadow Home Secretary, and I can inform the House that, if a general election produces a Labour Government, we will be prepared to legislate to extend citizenship to the small Asian community of Hong Kong.

In order to do so, though, we will need the same co-operation from the Conservative party that we offered it. We need that because, without it, we could not succeed in passing the legislation in the short interval between 1 May and the transfer of sovereignty on 30 June. I therefore ask the Foreign Secretary to give us the offer of co-operation we need if we are successfully to extend citizenship to that small group of residents in Hong Kong, who will otherwise be left without any other secure citizenship. It is a fair offer, and I hope that it will receive a frank reply, either tonight or subsequently in writing.

In the event that the Conservative party is unwilling to offer the same co-operation that we have put on the table for them, I repeat our existing commitment to the Asian residents of Hong Kong. A Labour Government would grant them the right of entry to Britain without requiring any proof of exceptional circumstances. Such a right could be extended by a Labour Government by administrative procedures, and would not require the legislation for which we would require the co-operation of a Conservative Opposition.

I hope that that will enable those in the Asian community of Hong Kong to plan with confidence for 30 June and to arrange for their affairs to continue in the colony beyond 30 June with the security of a guarantee of citizenship or the right of entry to Britain if they need it.

Much of this week in the House and the press outside has been preoccupied by debates over the transfer of sovereignty to Brussels—real or imagined. I rather wish that the transfer of sovereignty in Hong Kong would get a tenth of the attention given to the imagined transfer of sovereignty to Brussels. There is no precedent this century for two nations without war or conquest between them to come peacefully—

Sir Patrick Cormack: There is no precedent in any century.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman is probably perfectly correct.

I would not wish to hazard myself across the whole of history, but as far as my memory stretches, it is certainly correct that no two nations without war or conquest have peacefully—perhaps occasionally acrimoniously—negotiated such a voluntary transfer of sovereignty. It is an immense undertaking.

If we can resolve the outstanding issues and complete the transfer with success, that success will be of immense value to both China and Britain. For China it is important. The concept of one nation, two systems was not originally coined in Beijing to fit Hong Kong. It was originally proposed in Beijing to fit the situation in relation to Taiwan. If Beijing is to be successful in eventual rapprochement with Taiwan, it is essential that it can prove that the concept of one nation, two systems can work in Hong Kong.

For Britain, it is also important that we achieve a successful transfer. It is important to show that we have discharged our obligation to the people of Hong Kong that we will surrender sovereignty of the territory of Hong Kong without surrendering the liberty of the people of Hong Kong.

That is also important because our connection with Hong Kong will not end on 30 June. Indeed, one might argue that Hong Kong as an economic port will be more valuable to Britain after 30 June, because our economic and historical ties with it will provide us with an improved base from which to increase our trade and investment in the growing economy of China, in which Hong Kong will be the largest single economic centre. If we handle the transfer successfully, Hong Kong can become a bridge, not a barrier, between Britain and China. Irrespective of our other political differences, right hon. and hon. Members on both Front Benches—whatever side of the Chamber we find ourselves on by 30 June—must work together to achieve a successful outcome and to ensure that the Government of China are held to the undertakings that they have given to the people of Hong Kong.

6.29 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): We have heard two good speeches summing up the challenges and the problems of a unique event in history and I wish only to endorse some of what has been said and to raise one additional subject. On recent achievements, I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was able to authorise the legislation, which subsequently went through as a private Member's Bill, to ensure that the war widows are given passports. That should have been done and now has been done.

[Mr. David Howell]

We have had a few exchanges this afternoon about the non-Chinese minority, who have been told by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that if they are under pressure to leave, they will have the opportunity to come here. I am of the view, and have been for some time, that that is not enough. They are magnificent people who come, in many cases, from families who have served the British armed forces, the former British empire and this country with utter dedication and real feeling. It is not enough to leave them merely with the right of abode but not actually citizens of any country. I am fully aware of all the difficulties and problems, but I ask my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary whether he will reconsider.

I listened to what the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) said about co-operation and I heard the loud sound of chickens being counted before they were hatched. The right hon. Gentleman should pause a little before thinking about deals that he would make were there ever to be a Labour Government. I hope that the matter can be solved, whoever governs, in a non-adversarial, bipartisan way and the problem dealt with expeditiously by Parliament. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary—I hope that he will still be in office this time next year—can play his part in that.

The other points, which have been thoroughly covered, arise from the question of the provisional legislature. We all appeal to the People's Republic of China—because after 30 June the power will lie with its Government—to recognise the dangers of trying to run parallel Administrations and Legislative Councils.

I hope that the Chinese also see the dangers in starting to amend, or examining in preparation for amendment, certain laws. The proposal that the Basic Law for dealing with subversion, treason or sedition should be confirmed by Hong Kong after the transfer needs careful handling. If that law is to be turned into catch-all pieces of legislation that prevent anybody from doing anything that the authorities do not like, that will definitely undermine confidence in the future of Hong Kong and that of the international investing community. The result will not be that Hong Kong does not thrive, because it is full of people of enterprise who will continue to be as enterprising as they are in Guangzhou and Shanghai, but we shall see the end of Hong Kong as a miraculous world financial and industrial centre. It has been a fantastic global beacon during the last part of the 20th century, but that is the price that will be paid.

The provisional legislature needs close consideration—I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has given it that—as to whether its existence is consistent with the Basic Law. As we heard this afternoon, the Governor—my former right hon. Friend—was accused by some when he introduced the famous Patten reforms of contravening the Basic Law. I do not agree with those accusations, and the Foreign Affairs Committee considered the matter carefully and took the highest independent legal advice. We came to the conclusion that there was no breach of the Basic Law. But the new legislature would be set up flatly against the advice and wishes of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, as he said this afternoon, and of the British Government, and we must ask whether that action would be in co-operation with the British Administration. Clearly, it would not and it would contravene article 4 of the joint declaration, under which the People's Republic—with good faith, I am sure—and the British Government signed their undertaking that they would co-operate. The People's Republic undertook to co-operate with the British Administration before 30 June 1997. It is hard to describe its intentions as co-operation after what my right hon. and learned Friend wisely said this afternoon.

The argument that might prevail is that the Chinese proposals were a regrettable but necessary tit for tat, but that would raise the question whether two wrongs make a right—if the Patten reforms were wrong, and I do not believe that they were. If that is the argument, how soon will new, genuine elections be held to replace the Legislative Council? If the answer were that preparations would be made immediately after 30 June for a new LegCo and anyone could stand, as before—mostly the same people would be re-elected—it would be a mild reassurance. But that is not the case.

We are told that the elections will take place at the end of 1998, so that is a year and a half with a provisional, transitional, hand-picked, selected and unelected Government for the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong. That is a grave worry, which must send tremors round the world about investing in Hong Kong and in China, and which will weaken the general hope in the world that China is moving towards the global mainstream of economic, social and political development. There are real dangers in the second LegCo, because it weakens the rule of law if the source of law is being duplicated and if half the Members of LegCo are seduced into another legislature, as the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) said.

The undertaking of the Chinese Ministers—and I believe them to be wise and dignified men—was that they would maintain the laws and freedom of Hong Kong and its way of life. That is what was said in article 5 of the Basic Law; if that is what was meant, it cannot be consistent with changing the way of life by introducing a selective rather than elected Legislative Council, even for only 18 months. Much has been said on that point this afternoon, and I endorse what my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said about trying to get a message to our Chinese friends that their proposals are not in their interests, nor in Hong Kong's interests, nor in the interests of the wider world.

I wish to say a brief word about monitoring after 30 June. The joint liaison group has some remit and some responsibilities for keeping an eye on the unfolding situation and seeing how the ends are tied up. I hope that it will be able to do that. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was in Hong Kong recently, he made a superb speech about Hong Kong not being forgotten and said that we would be watching and would be vigilant. We must take those words seriously—I am sure that my right hon. Friend meant them—and give them some content. They would be given content if the covenants were signed by the Beijing Government and if they reported to the United Nations. Indeed, Hong Kong could report on itself and it would be good if that could happen as soon as possible. But there are also some tasks to be performed by the House and perhaps by independent groups elsewhere, outside the official parliamentary system.

The other day, the Governor, Chris Patten, set down four matters that he believed needed to be watched carefully after 30 June. First, will the civil service be independent and continue to act in a sensible, uncorrupted way? We hope so and there are good signs that that may be the case. Will the monetary authority be interfered with? We hope not, and the recent agreement is quite reassuring. Will the legislature—LegCo, or whatever shape it takes—pass local laws, or laws that have clearly been pushed upon it for ideological and party reasons by Beijing? We do not know, and we shall have to watch closely. Above all, will the courts be allowed to operate freely, with an independent judiciary?

I hope that the House will continue to ask those questions. They ought to be asked, and if our friends in Beijing say that that is interfering, we must say, "Sorry, but Hong Kong is really an international affair. It is an international centre for the entire planet, important to the world's economic system just as it is to China's economic system, and its affairs would deserve the clearest monitoring even if we were not transferring sovereignty. Moreover, we are transferring sovereignty. We have this responsibility here and we must fulfil it." Thoughts must be turned to the way in which we can fulfil the monitoring responsibility after 30 June next year.

Inevitably this will be a short debate, and I have little to add. However, I am left with a slight unease about the saga from 1984 onwards. Was that really the best that we could do? At the time everyone said yes, but I was never totally convinced that we might not have handled Beijing a little differently with regard to a possible renewal of the lease.

There is a certain sourness in some quarters, and a feeling of resignation and sadness about the way in which the story is ending. I put no blame whatever on Governor Chris Patten, who has fought magnificently to entrench and to raise standards of democracy, and to meet the feeling of the people of Hong Kong that they want to speak for themselves. He has done everything humanly possible to set the scene for a Hong Kong that will continue to be free, proud and prosperous within the greater China.

Perhaps it is not useful to dish out blame, but looking back, I must say that we were badly let down by the so-called China hands, who said that they knew exactly how to talk to China. Somehow they got us into a position in which everything started in a peremptory way, and we had no chance to argue that although Hong Kong had always been part of China, it might be better for us to continue to administer it—that we had done so for 100 years and could do so for another 100 years. The so-called experts on how to deal with the Middle Kingdom turned out to have no idea how to do that in practice.

Since then, all successive British Government leaders and Foreign Secretaries have handled the matter well, with the help of highly skilled Governors—both the previous Governor, who did excellently, and the present Governor. We have succeeded in making the best of the 1984 position.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said, the economy of Hong Kong and its stock market have roared ahead. Property prices are a little shaky, but they have not done badly, and in general, enterprise has continued to thrive. May all that continue, and may the gloomier views—that difficulties and doubts about the rule of law would undermine everything—be wrong.

Hong Kong is a challenge. It will need watching. The people of Hong Kong are determined to meet that challenge, as they tell us when they come here and speak so magnificently, and I hope that this Parliament of liberty will be with them in their struggle.

6.43 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Just after the 1979 election, I went to Hong Kong with a newly elected Member of the House. His name was Chris Patten. During that visit, what struck and impressed us both was the fantastic, vibrant, energetic society developing there, with an increasingly well-educated community and society.

When we came back, we went jointly to plead with Ministers to try to introduce a degree of representative democracy, at least at local level—municipal and district—so that the changing and developing nature of the community in Hong Kong could be reflected in democratic representative institutions.

There may be differences of view, but I appreciate the fact that when, more than a decade later, Chris Patten ended up in the incredible position of being the Governor of the colony, he faced a complicated and difficult choice. Perhaps we forget the context of that choice. It was not simply a through train from 1984, because between 1984 and the early 1990s, when Chris Patten assumed responsibility, traumatic events happened in China.

We cannot underestimate the traumatic effect of Tiananmen square on the people of Hong Kong. I was in the square in the early weeks when the crowds were gathering, when there were a mere quarter of a million people there. The traumatic effect of the events that followed some weeks later led to a profound change of attitude in Hong Kong.

As Governor, Chris Patten faced a real dilemma—whether to find a solution acceptable to the Chinese, but utterly unacceptable to the people of Hong Kong in the wake of Tiananmen square, or to do the opposite. He chose the latter, and I support that decision. However, he paid the inevitable price—that the Chinese would renounce and denounce the arrangements that had been put in place.

Anyone who talks to the LegCo councillors elected under the new system, anyone who knows the people and supports and listens to them, realises that what has happened is a wonderful example and illustration of democratic institutions. They reflect the opinions and feelings of the people of Hong Kong in a varied way, across a wide spectrum.

There is open debate, and the councillors argue among themselves. There is no unanimity. But that is the healthy nature of the pluralistic society and its reflection in a pluralistic institution. It would be a tragedy if that was dismantled and destroyed by the Chinese authorities.

A perfectly reasonable question for my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) to ask Ministers is, "Where do we go from here?" What else can be done to try to safeguard the situation in Hong Kong? I am less sanguine than some. Although growing economic liberalism has been developing within China,

[Mr. Ted Rowlands]

there is no evidence that the Chinese leadership connects economic liberalism with any form of political liberalism. At present, Chinese Ministers appear to believe that they can have one without the other.

If that is so, the Chinese Government may draw the wrong conclusion about Hong Kong. They may believe that they can continue to have economic liberalism while severely restricting Hong Kong with an arbitrary political arrangement. Surely that is the idea reflected in the proposed "selectorate" that will choose the new provisional Legislative Council or committee.

However much we may huff and puff in the House, how can we influence a powerful nation that feels committed to dismantling and disrupting the present arrangements and the elected Legislative Council? China has said that it will do that, so it will.

As I asked the Foreign Secretary earlier, without ganging up or driving people into corners, is there any way in which, possibly collectively with our partners in the European Union, we can say to the Chinese that it would be a dreadful mistake on their part, and would affect their relationships with Europe and their other international relationships, if they went ahead and dismantled the elected Legislative Council?

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): My hon. Friend is right, but will he also think about the fear felt by the unelected leadership in Beijing about what may happen in Hong Kong if the Chinese do not dismantle the democracy? That is what makes them propose the provisional legislature. The Foreign Office and Her Majesty's Government have a role to play in trying to dispel that fear. I do not think that it will make any difference to the leadership in Beijing if LegCo as now constituted continues after 30 June. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Mr. Rowlands: I am sure that there is that fear. I am sure that there is also a fear that that would set an example that an increasing number of people in China might wish to follow. The all-night vigils have also caused the young people of Hong Kong to stand up and identify with the problems of young people in China.

Mr. Faulds: What does my hon. Friend think the British direction of Hong Kong would have done to those young men 40 or 50 years ago?

Mr. Rowlands: I would not know; I do not wish to presume what it would have done 40 or 50 years ago. I am sure that it would not have been a democratic, liberal response of the kind that, I suspect, my hon. Friend is referring to, but fortunately we have moved on. The demonstrators in Tiananmen square were reflecting the change in attitudes that has taken place in international society and which is taking place in China and in Hong Kong. It would be tragic if the Chinese authorities were deliberately to undermine a perfectly democratically elected institutional structure of the kind that now exists in Hong Kong.

In further response to the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), I hope that, whatever the Chinese decide to do, and whatever critical developments they decide need to take place in China, we shall argue that Hong Kong is supposed to be a Special Administrative Region and that it must be a special democratically elected region. The Chinese should be able to make that distinction. However, there is not much evidence that they are making it. That is because—from what I read, anyway—the Chinese authorities have not reached the conclusion that economic liberalism must be accompanied, in due course, by political liberalism of the kind that has developed in Hong Kong.

Will Ministers please consider what further diplomatic political action they will take, alone or in conjunction with others, to attempt to head off the collapse and dismantling of the democratically elected Legislative Council in its present form? Otherwise, this debate will have been only empty words.

I read with great interest the statement by the Governor in his last address:

> "I hope that the world will judge Hong Kong not by preconceptions but by the evidence of what actually happens here."

He listed some clear benchmarks that the international community and the world should observe. They included:

> "Is the Hong Kong legislature passing laws in response to the aspirations of the Hong Kong community . . . ?
>
> Is the Hong Kong press still free, with uninhibited coverage of China and of issues on which China has strong views?
>
> Are new constraints being imposed on freedom of assembly? Are the annual commemorations and vigils of recent years still being allowed?"

Those are pertinent questions. The international community can check those benchmarks, to test how much the special position of Hong Kong and its newly democratically elected institutions are being sustained. We should do more than check that excellent series of benchmarks. We should invite our partners in the European Union, the United States—to which China looks for support in a variety of international organisations—and many other nation states to join us in arguing those points to the Chinese authorities, in the hope that they will back down and at least modify their position and their view in relation to the existing institutions in Hong Kong.

The Chinese authorities should realise that, if the next vigil in commemoration of the Tiananmen square massacre is interfered with, in the year post 1997, that will send an incredible signal to the international community and the world that the fundamental rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong have been undermined.

Let us therefore make the Governor's benchmarks our own.

6.53 pm

Mr. Tim Renton (Mid–Sussex): The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) rightly asked how we, in the House of Commons, can influence that powerful country, China, to which sovereignty over Hong Kong will return in only eight months' time.

Shortly before today's debate, I was on a radio broadcast with Christine Loh, one of the very well-known, very strong-minded members of the Legislative Council delegation that is visiting this country. The first question that Nick Ross asked us both was, "What is the point of the debate that is happening in the House of Commons today?" In effect, he was asking, "How effective or ineffectual will the House of Commons be in everything

to do with Hong Kong, once the transition has taken place in eight months' time?" That is a fair question, and it behoves us Back Benchers, after the good Front-Bench speeches, to adopt a practical approach to answering it.

I first went to Hong Kong in 1966 as a young business man. Right hon. and hon. Members will be relieved to hear that I shall not bore the House with memories of what Hong Kong was like then—how big the godowns were and so on—but I remember that the transition had just been made from a fleet of Austin Morris taxis that met one at the docks, station or airport to a fleet of Mercedes, and at the time that was regarded as a step with very dangerous consequences for British imperialism and British trade. Thirty years later, that thought remains in my mind.

That year, 1966, was dominated by China's threat to cut off the water supply to Kowloon. Let us be realistic—throughout the past 30 years, Hong Kong has been on the receiving end of that threat, literal or metaphorical, to cut off water supplies. Our position has always been that of a leaseholder who has a full repairing lease stating that he must return the property—the territory, except for the island of Hong Kong, a few other small islands and a very small part of Kowloon—to the freeholder on 30 June 1997.

As has been said, in what an extraordinarily good condition we are returning the property! When else in the history of the world has a lease been returned with values of property—including property belonging to the Government—as high as they are, with the stock market almost at its top and with £38 billion in the Treasury? The Chinese can never have expected to receive anything like that in the handover, but there it is; it is going to happen.

Will the Chinese show their gratitude to Britain or to the Governor of Hong Kong for the extraordinarily generous handover of that extremely successful economy? When I say gratitude, I do not mean large orders for GEC and British Aerospace, very nice as those would be, but gratitude in terms of the strict observance of the joint agreement, the Basic Law and the principle "one country, two systems" for at least the next 50 years.

I do not propose to talk about LegCo and provisional LegCo. Our worries have been properly expressed by right hon. and hon. Members from both sides of the House. I would rather talk about two other aspects. The first aspect is the free press, television and radio. As Minister responsible for Hong Kong for two and a half years under Lord Howe, I regarded the Hong Kong press as the nastiest in the world after the British press.

I am sure that the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), knows that often a Minister who travels abroad receives a great deal of deference, unlike what one receives in London. That is certainly not the case in Hong Kong. There was not much television when I visited, but there was an incredible number of newspapers, all seeking an angle from which to attack the Minister. I believe that that independence of mind in the press and broadcasting must continue in some shape or form after 1 July 1997. There should not be a caving-in to the pressure that will certainly come against dissent and for uniform, stereotyped and monolithic broadcasting and press reporting.

Mr. MacShane *rose—*

Mr. Renton: I see that the hon. Gentleman, who is an expert on this subject, is trying to catch my eye.

Mr. MacShane: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the *South China Morning Post*—which gave him such a hard time when he visited Hong Kong as a Minister—is now a pale shadow of its former self? Mr. Murdoch has sold it on, and it is adjusting rapidly.

The Government and the House must fully back the World Service in its television and radio manifestations. Governor Patten paid tribute to the World Service in his speech to the CBI in Harrogate earlier this week, when he was campaigning for a place back in this country. The House can take practical and concrete decisions on boosting the BBC World Service operations in Chinese, Cantonese and Mandarin.

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman anticipates something that I proposed to say in three or four minutes. I remember the *South China Morning Post* well. When I was the Minister responsible, I came from Beijing to Hong Kong, via Guangzhou. I remember the political secretary bringing me a copy of that day's *South China Morning Post*, the banner headline of which stated:

"Renton to run the gauntlet in Hong Kong tomorrow".

I had said something in Beijing of which LegCo did not approve and, my God, I was to be told so the following day. That is the spirit of independence, free speech and dissent that one wishes to see continue.

The other matter that has been touched on to a great extent in the debate is human rights, a subject to which the Legislative Council delegation that is here at the moment has wished to draw the attention of the House. I was struck by the third paragraph of the first page of the memorandum that it sent to us, which points out that the UN Commission on Human Rights took the view

"that human rights treaties devolved with territory and that states continue to be bound by the obligations under the covenant entered by the predecessor state. Once a people living in a territory find themselves under the protection of the covenant, such protection cannot be denied to them by virtue of the mere dismemberment of that territory, or its coming within the jurisdiction of another state or more than one state."

If the Government are unable to persuade China before the end of June to accept that reports on civil rights in Hong Kong should continue to go to the UN Commission on Human Rights, I hope that this Parliament, and other friendly Parliaments, can concentrate on that matter in the years ahead.

The example of Wang Dan, the pro-democracy leader who was sentenced to 11 years in Beijing gaol, has been quoted in the debate. It is noteworthy that Governor Patten said that what

"Wang had done was regarded as legal in many places."

Those are words that must worry us all, just as the treatment of human rights in that other Special Administrative Region, Tibet, must cause deep worries in the House. I hope that the eyes of the world will focus on those aspects of Hong Kong after 1 July 1997.

[Mr. Renton]

Some say that Hong Kong will succeed because the Chinese will wish to persuade Taiwan to rejoin the People's Republic, and the Taiwanese will look closely at what happens in Hong Kong. That is an understandable and pragmatic argument, but I hope that Hong Kong succeeds because the mainland Chinese genuinely want and believe in the joint declaration and the Basic Law. One must repeat, however, that Tibet does not have the economic strength of Hong Kong, and the principle of "one country, two systems" that should apply to Tibet clearly has not. Last week, Li Lanqing, the Vice Premier of the state council, was here, and was asked by a colleague at a meeting before lunch at the Foreign Office whether people had the right to worship any kind of religion. He replied, in terms, that they did. Clearly, that should apply to Tibet just as much as to Hong Kong, or to any of the provinces and regions of mainland China.

The right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) talked about China being linked up with fibre optic cable, and he saw this as a means of centralising information in Beijing to create greater control over the regions and provinces. It is true that interactive technology leads in an extraordinary way to the possibilities of global learning using the electronic information networks. By the beginning of the next millennium, it is reckoned that 1 billion students throughout the world will be in the process of, or will wish to be in the process of, learning English as their second language.

That gives me a suitable opportunity—as an unpaid vice-chairman of that great body, the British Council—to mention that that is a fantastic opportunity for the British Council to be involved in China, as we propose to be, in the extension of English language teaching, the training of English language teachers and the bringing of postgraduate Chinese students to this country. We are taking positive steps in that direction, and we shall launch our first joint venture English language teaching centre in Beijing in early 1997, in co-operation with the State Education Commission. We shall open other centres in Shanghai and Guangzhou in subsequent years.

In 1995-96, the number of people taking our English language and professional examinations in China was 2,550. By 1996-97, that will have increased by 250 per cent. to 6,375. We propose to open examination centres in 10 Chinese cities from March 1997, and we shall continue to increase the use of British teaching qualifications. I mention those matters to the House as examples of positive ways in which the British Council can and should have a distinct role in the development of Sino-British relationships in the 21st century.

Let me reinforce the point that the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) made to me by saying that that work can often be done in partnership with the BBC World Service. I hope, therefore—I address these words to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office—that the British Council and the BBC World Service will receive reasonable and generous treatment in the next expenditure round, the negotiation of which is drawing to a conclusion. It would cause great upset in the House to friends of both organisations if such a reasonable settlement did not appear.

A number of colleagues have referred to my right hon. Friend—I mean those words literally—the Governor, Chris Patten. When he took on the job of Governor four and a half years ago, he knew that it was an impossible job and that his task was to make it seem as possible as he could. In addition, his task was not only to leave Hong Kong economically and socially strong, but to ensure that one part of its strength was the habit of multi-party elections. He tried to make that little oak tree grow faster than it had before. That resulted in the popularisation of the functional seats—changing the process from "election by small colleges of members" to, in effect, "election by a reasonably large number of concerned voters". As we all know, that was never accepted by China. The Governor—to use one of the tennis analogies of which he has become increasingly fond—served the tennis ball, expected it to be returned and was ready to develop a rally of suggestions and counter-suggestions. In fact, no attempt was made to return the ball: it simply hit the back fencing and has stayed there ever since.

There is no point in speculating, with the 100 per cent. vision that is hindsight, whether different tactics could have achieved more lasting and better results. In that respect, Chris Patten tried for all he was worth, but he failed. He should take full credit for what he aimed to do, although it was unsuccessful.

It is foolish for Back Benchers to pretend that the end result is good for democracy; it is not. The Legislative Council elected in 1994 will be abolished, the successor body will be unelected and, about 18 months later, there will be another elected LegCo. It is essential that that further elected LegCo should not be a quisling body and that it should have different, contentious, argumentative and dissident Members.

The first judgment of Hong Kong in the eyes of the world should be on the basis of whether the new body is merely uniform and pro-Peking or whether it is truly a difficult legislative assembly, like ours and others throughout the world. The judgment of the outside world will depend on its being a multi-party legislative assembly.

There is the rub, because, as many of us know, China is not a multi-party country; it has not yet learnt how to adapt itself for the post-communist age. The 20th century has largely been the century of the United States; the 21st century is likely to be the century of China. I respect that, and I understand the wish of British firms to do business there and to get bigger and bigger orders, but China faces the enormous problem of adapting to the post-communist age.

It remains to be seen whether China's transition will be peaceful or bloody and whether it will be uniform and controlled from the centre or diverse and spread throughout the regions. The long-term future of Hong Kong depends more on the transition in mainland China than on anything else.

In a recent speech in Edinburgh, Lord Skidelsky referred to one country with two systems—one of capitalist economies and the other of communist politics. That is the paradox that China has yet to work out. No doubt, Parliament will have some role in monitoring and discussing how that development takes place but, realistically, we should all remember the words of the Dalai Lama, spoken in the Jubilee Room when he was here in July:

"Each of us can work to change a small proportion of events."

That is all that the House of Commons can seek and aim to do in the years ahead.

7.13 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Despite the upbeat way in which the Foreign Secretary began this debate, it has been—and cannot be other than—a sombre debate. As the right hon. Member for Mid–Sussex (Mr. Renton) said, 11 years have passed since the debates on the Hong Kong Bill; one would have thought that that was more than ample time for any differences, ambiguities and uncertainties remaining after the conclusion of the joint agreement to be resolved. Yet fundamental differences persist.

The joint agreement was warmly welcomed when it was made; it was hailed as a remarkable breakthrough, with its concept, as the right hon. Gentleman reminded us, of one country and two systems, and it was greeted in an atmosphere of excited optimism. In a debate in 1984, I said:

"can Britain do anything about making the agreement stick in the spirit as well as the words? . . . As someone said to me in Hong Kong in October"—

that was October 1984—

"'the music is good but the song must be well sung.' In other words, it is the implementation and practice that are important."

That remains the position today. I went on to say:

"I am sure that something can be done."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 415.]

I am not so sure now, and time is much shorter.

The omens for the maintenance and extension of democracy, the sustaining of a judiciary independent of government, and the continued operation of a free press and free media are fairly bleak. Those are the crucial characteristics that the joint agreement was thought to conserve and protect; they define the distinctiveness of the system in Hong Kong by contrast with the system in the People's Republic of China.

Reference has already been made by the Foreign Secretary and by the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) to Wang Dan, the 26-year-old dissident student imprisoned for 11 years. What were his crimes? They were writing articles in overseas publications criticising the Chinese Government, joining an overseas correspondence course run by the university of California and setting up a mutual aid scheme for dissidents released from gaol.

When the Chinese were criticised by the British, French, Americans and others, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said:

"the trial of Wang Dan is entirely a Chinese legal procedure, carried out in accordance with the law".

I want to couple that quotation with one from the letter circulated to all hon. Members by the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), responding to criticisms of Chinese Foreign Minister Qian's interview in *The Asian Wall Street Journal*. The Minister said that the Government had reminded China of its obligations concerning freedom of speech under the joint agreement. He added:

"Mr. Qian has since said that the rights and freedoms of the Hong Kong people set out in the Basic Law will be protected according to law".

That inspires much less confidence and much more trepidation than it used to.

We must, as most hon. Members have been, be blunt, clear and open about our concerns. I want Britain to leave Hong Kong with honour. We are, after all, delivering a large group of people into the hands of those from whom they fled. A member of the LegCo delegation that I met yesterday put it succinctly:

"What the British can do they won't; what they want to do they can't."

We could, of course, have offered the guarantee of British citizenship—and we still could. That would be the ultimate proof of our confidence in the agreement; it would provide security for people in Hong Kong and show China that we accepted our responsibility for them and believed that China would fulfil its accepted obligations. I do not believe that it would lead to a vast influx of Chinese into the country, but it would put enormous pressure on China to make the agreement work.

The Government often preach about morality. The issue of citizenship is a profoundly moral question. It is greatly to the credit of the LegCo delegation led by Emily Lau—whose tenacity in the pursuit of democracy I salute—that despite the passage of 11 years since the agreement left them with a toytown passport which gives them no right of abode outside Hong Kong and subject to the willingness of the Chinese to accept them, it spent much time pleading the cause of the 6,000 or so, mainly Indian, ethnic minority people.

I shall not say much about that, because the matter has been well rehearsed. However, the Foreign Secretary quoted again the Prime Minister's remark to the effect that if they

"come under pressure to leave"

they will be allowed into this country. As the right hon. Member for Livingston said, defining that condition, given the way in which the Home Office deals with refugees, could be a nightmare. The treatment of the families of the Gurkhas who left Hong Kong does not impress in that regard. I warmly welcome the statement of the right hon. Member for Livingston on the ethnic minorities.

I studied the Minister's letter with great care. There was some repetition of it in the Foreign Secretary's speech. The appointment of a provisional legislature has been dealt with already. I welcome the Foreign Secretary's strong condemnation of that proposition. The House's response should encourage him to pursue the issue with vigour. In mentioning that Hong Kong had been accepted into several international organisations, he said that Hong Kong had been accepted in its own right. If the legislature is appointed and not elected, to talk of Hong Kong in "its own right" is meaningless.

I followed with interest the remarks of the right hon. Member for Livingston about the effect of Governor Patten's extension of democracy and the fact that the Chinese were supposed to have felt that it breached their understanding. The Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee seemed not to support that contention. I think that Governor Patten was right. I am not sure what the right hon. Member for Livingston would have done otherwise—apart from nothing, which is not a good idea.

Reference has been made to the fact that perhaps 50 per cent. of the existing Members of LegCo may be persuaded to join the proposed provisional legislature if it comes to pass, but it has been insufficiently stressed that the 50 per cent. who will not join are the democratically elected Members. They will not join because they know that if they did, their future as democratic politicians would be prejudiced.

[Sir Russell Johnston]

What about the international covenants? The Minister's letter states that the Chinese are "actively" considering accession. What evidence is there of that? It would be a considerable advance if they were, but I take leave very much to doubt it. If they were to do that, it would be not only Hong Kong with which they would be concerned, but other parts of China such as Tibet, as the right hon. Member for Mid-Sussex said.

I ask the Minister again to spell out how Britain views her monitoring responsibilities after the handover. The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) mentioned that. There is no mechanism, or proposed mechanism, to deal with it. Perhaps the consulate might be involved. I should like to know.

The Minister says that the United Nations human rights committee has stated that it will accept reporting

"on whatever basis China and Britain agree".

But they have not agreed, although they have had 11 years to do so. What commitment does Britain make to monitor and report to the United Nations? The Minister must answer that.

The Minister rightly said that confidence in Hong Kong has been holding up well. But as one LegCo Member said to me,

"there is a deep sense of resignation. For good or ill we can do nothing: we must be optimistic."

I want to be optimistic, too. I want the transition to go well.

In Chris Patten, we have had in our last Governor our best Governor. But our refusal to guarantee citizenship shames us. Our bystander approach to the erosion of basic elements in the agreement does not do us credit. Hon. Members will have read the trenchant and direct letter from Martin Lee. We still have time to make amends and to go out proudly. I hope that that is what we shall do.

7.25 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): It is always a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston), with whom I have co-operated on several ventures and with whom I rarely find myself at odds on foreign affairs. I agree strongly with much of what he said. I agree that we have a moral obligation. Moral obligations are real. What is morally wrong is never politically right. I think that we made a mistake in not granting passports. Like the hon. Gentleman, I believe that, far from being faced with an influx of indigent people from the east, we would merely have given due reassurance where it was deserved. We would also have shown China that we truly meant business in every way.

There are things that we could, and should, still do. It is disappointing that the Chamber is so empty, but those hon. Members who are present are deeply committed and concerned. I hope that we can translate that commitment and concern not only beyond today but beyond 30 June 1997.

Extraordinary situations call for extraordinary remedies. It has been said during the debate that we are dealing with an unparalleled and unprecedented situation. As we have a continuing responsibility, which is recognised by the fact that the joint liaison group will continue to the year 2000, should we not discover what we can do through the mechanisms at our disposal in the House? Is there not a case for a special Select Committee to continue to monitor what happens in Hong Kong? Would that not be an earnest of our good intentions to our friends from Hong Kong?

I cannot pretend to the long and detailed knowledge of Hong Kong that many hon. Members can bring to the debate. I went there for the first time little more than a month ago. It was a great honour to lead what will be the last Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegation to Hong Kong. It was an attractive invitation, not least because the week that we went coincided with the Conservative party conference, so I was able to employ myself productively and miss what is not my favourite week of the year.

It was a fascinating experience. I know that the six of us who went—three from each side of the House—were deeply impressed and very moved by what we saw and heard. The vibrancy of the place is quite amazing. Those who have been there know that from experience, while those who have not can only imagine, as I sought to do in the past. Whether one was looking down at the floor of the stock exchange or watching the extraordinary movement of earth to create the new airport, one was aware that one was in a quite amazing place. It really is fantastic, with its innovative skills and the wonderful industry of its people.

We were impressed, too, when we met our former right hon. Friend the Governor, who gave us a good portion of his time. I agree again with the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber that Hong Kong can never have had a better Governor: he has served Hong Kong and his country with immense distinction during the four and a half years that he has been there. Yes, in many ways it was an impossible task, but he has brought to it a determination and a realism that few could have matched. What was noticeable when one talked to people in Hong Kong was that even though some had reservations about some of the Governor's judgments, and it would be idle to pretend that they did not, no one really had a bad word to say for him.

Mr. MacShane: Did the hon. Gentleman meet Sir Percy Craddock?

Sir Patrick Cormack: I am afraid that that honour was denied to us on that occasion—my vote is for Patten in all circumstances.

We met the deputy director of the New China News Agency and we were assured that all would be well. We must hope and pray that it is. Even among those who expressed the greatest buoyant confidence, as many did—it would do them a disservice not to make that plain tonight—one detected an underlying apprehension. One also discovered that many of those who were investing, quite rightly, so much of their time, talents and, yes, their money in Hong Kong, nevertheless had the security of another passport. They hope, and I hope, that they will never have to fall back upon that security. It will be a test of the new Chinese administration that they never have to.

I should like to mention one or two issues, some of which have been touched on before but which are tremendously important as Hong Kong moves inexorably towards the transition to a new sovereignty. I shall not

labour the point about ethnic minorities as I hope that I have made my position plain on the general passport issue. I do not doubt for a minute the good faith of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, because I have great admiration for him, which is well known. I am afraid, however, that his statement, while full of good intent, was not enough. I beg my right hon. Friend to go that further mile—it is not even that, rather a few feet—and give that finite group of people proper protection. They are typified by the Indian whom we met at Whitehead detention centre, who has served Her Majesty the Queen with immense distinction over many years, but who does not know what the future holds. If anyone deserves the security of a proper passport, it is that man and others like him.

It is incumbent upon the House to do all that it can to impress upon our right hon. Friends in government the need to give those people passports. It will be seen as mean-spirited if we do not, and it will be seen as no more than proper recognition if we do—and we should.

In Hong Kong there is a real unease among the ethnic minorities and others about what will happen to their freedoms. Apart from the economic magnitude of the place, two things are most impressive to the first-time visitor. One is the true freedom of the press and the media to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) referred. The other is how one can wander around at almost any hour of the night and feel totally safe.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North–West Norfolk): That is more than one can say about other places.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Yes, indeed.

People fear for those freedoms. The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber has already referred to the young man, Wang Dan, and his example brings back the terrible memories of a few years ago.

Of course we want the concept of "one country—two systems" to work. Of course I am prepared to acknowledge that the 21st century will probably be China's century, and I recognise the importance of that country. Nevertheless, one has to say to the Chinese that they must demonstrate that those freedoms will survive. For our part, we must do everything we can to impress upon them just how important we reckon that survival to be. What has happened in China recently and what is happening with the provisional Legislative Council do not offer encouragement. One has to communicate that to the Chinese firmly and clearly.

Another remarkable thing about Hong Kong is the lack of corruption. That country has a legal system of which it has every right to be proud, and it is important that that remarkably buoyant society should retain those incorrupt values. One is worried not least because of the enormous disparity in payments between those who will be in one system and those operating under the other. When one considers what the garrison of the People's Liberation Army will be paid in comparison with what the Hong Kong police rightly receive, one can see the seeds of problems. We must be alive to those issues.

I am delighted to see that one of my companions on our trip, the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), is in the Chamber because we should not let the debate pass without paying tribute to the way in which the forces of the Crown have defended Hong Kong for a century and a half. I speak for all of us when I say how impressed we were by the sheer professionalism, efficiency and dedication of the young men of the Navy and Army whom we visited on one of our days in Hong Kong. The new garrison has a lot to live up to.

Gesture politics are rightly often condemned, but there is a time for the gesture when it is truly symbolic. Much has been said about the handover ceremony, and it is extremely important that we should be represented at the highest possible level. I hope very much that the Prince of Wales will be there. I hope that the Prime Minister, whoever he is—and of course I hope that it will be the present Prime Minister—will also be there. Although the noble Baroness Thatcher will be very welcome, she should be only one of many in attendance. The Prime Minister of this country should be there, and I hope that by his attendance he will demonstrate yet again our continued commitment to Hong Kong.

I conclude where I began, with the joint liaison group. There is provision for it to sit until 2000. It must do so, and it must remain active. I believe that we should monitor continually the workings of the transition in every possible way, not just to 2000 but beyond. I repeat my suggestion that the House should devise some means of allowing a Select Committee to examine the affairs of Hong Kong and to monitor continuously what occurs. All hon. Members have a duty to that last great colony. If we are to honour our commitment in the way the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber suggested, we must do something rather than merely make proclamations.

7.40 pm

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), whom I have to call an honourable and an old friend. He and I work closely together in cultural matters upon which he is very good and extremely knowledgeable. He also has considerable political courage on issues such as Bosnia, where only very few of us understood what was going on and pursued the right policy of intervention. Perhaps when he has lived with the Chinese and Hong Kong relationship for as long as I have, he will be nearly as good on that issue as he was on Bosnia. I am happy to help to educate him tonight in a brief speech which I hope will make some pungent and factual points.

The signing of the joint declaration in December 1984 by the Chinese and British Governments was a great and historic achievement. It was the outcome of the dedicated work primarily of our own Sir Geoffrey, now Lord Howe, who played a most significant role in bringing that agreement into being. The other contributor was Lord MacLehose who, if we are talking about Governors of Hong Kong, we must put at the apex of achievement while Mr. Patten would be playing in the puddles. Lord MacLehose was a great Governor and there have been others nearly as great as he. It was also the work of the Chinese Foreign Affairs Vice Premier, Zhou Nan, and very much involved in that work was the present Chinese ambassador to London, whom I have known for 24 or 25 years and for whom I have the greatest respect as an extremely able diplomat.

That declaration set the Basic Law of Hong Kong and was, to those who knew anything about the problems of bringing those two systems together, an immense

[Mr. Andrew Faulds]

achievement out of all expectations. Very importantly, in his statement in the House of Commons, the then Sir Geoffrey Howe stated:

"I should like to draw the attention of the House"—

to my speech at the moment, but on that occasion Sir Geoffrey continued—

"to the following important features of the draft agreement. It constitutes a formal international agreement, legally binding in all its parts. This is the highest form of commitment that can be given by one sovereign state to another".—[*Official Report*, 25 October 1984; Vol. 65, c. 819.]

That is why Patten failed us. Unfortunately for Hong Kong, Chris Patten lost his seat in the 1992 general election—would to God he had held it, by however small a majority—and the Prime Minister, in recompense and, I presume, in solace, appointed him Governor of Hong Kong. A man—I must be frank about this—who seems to know little of either Hong Kong or China and a man who, deplorably, was not prepared to listen to those who did know about those two countries.

There was excellent article in the *South China Morning Post* in September this year, which some of my colleagues may have read. It was by Sir Percy Craddock, another great figure in our relations with China. In that article, he said one or two moderately unkind things about the Governor, puncturing his pretensions and showing him up as an ambitious, scheming politician—and I don't think anybody who met Patten in his earlier manifestations would disagree with that analysis—in this instance with an eye on his own future regardless of the real interests of Hong Kongers. I feel not the slightest embarrassment in being as blunt as I can about what I think has been a disastrous term by Patten as Governor of Hong Kong at the worst possible moment in history.

The Basic Law provided that Members of the last Legislative Council under the British Administration—that is, before 30 June 1997—could become Members of the first Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. What an admirable arrangement. That was the so-called through-train agreement, which was in the original agreements. There had been also an exchange of seven letters—not two or three—between the two Foreign Ministers to agree on the composition and the method of election for that process. Those arrangements would have ensured a smooth transition.

However, the arrogant and ill-informed Governor Patten pursued his policy of constitutional reform. It had all been agreed and then Patten introduced constitutional reform. He reneged on the through-train arrangement, and on the seven letters, and pressed ahead with local legislation to change unilaterally the system for the 1995 Hong Kong election which introduced a different plan for the composition of the last Legislative Council. That clearly violated the agreements between the two countries—it is no good either Front Bench trying to dissimulate or pretend it is not so. It is disingenuous—I use a charitable expression—for the Foreign Secretary to claim otherwise.

Understandably, China could not accept this breach of the agreement and stated that the LegCo, thus introduced by Patten's reforms, would cease on 30 June 1997. And they announced the setting up of a provisional Legislative Council as a temporary body whose laws would not become operative until 1 July 1997? That body will be disbanded upon the establishment of the first Legislative Council of the Hong Kong SAR which will be elected—I do not believe talk about a later date—no later than 1 July 1998. If there is two or three months' slippage, so what?

It serves no useful purpose to argue about what was an inevitable outcome. The idea that China would accept the deal was arrogance beyond belief on the part of the Governor and his ill-informed advisers. Once that failed Bath politician had monkeyed about with the agreed arrangements, there would be no completion of his new project. I refer the House back to Sir Geoffrey Howe's statement that I quoted at the beginning of my speech. It was quite clear that was a cut-and-dried series of agreements and Patten's constitutional reform aborted it.

There are some politicians in Hong Kong who wish to see the outcome for Hong Kong in the dire terms that they describe. They ignore the most basic fact in the whole matter: it is in China's interests that, under the two systems one country policy set out in the joint declaration, Hong Kong's capitalist system and its success should continue. There is a guarantee that that will ensue for at least 50 years. China, for those of us who know something about its history, is historically a country that keeps its agreements.

We can all, however, guarantee our bottom Hong Kong dollar that the scaremongers and the wreckers such as Martin Lee already have their get-out passports tucked conveniently hidden in their back pockets.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Faulds: If you must, yes.

Mr. Banks: It is very sweet of you to give way to me, dear Friend. May I say to my very good Friend, whom I listen to carefully and from whom I have learnt a lot, that Martin Lee has made it clear that he intends to stay in Hong Kong after 30 June 1997. I suspect that he is running a damn sight more risks than my dear and hon. Friend is running, even with his bad cold.

Mr. Faulds: I am sorry that my hon. Friend had to comment on my cold, which somewhat spoils the organ that is my best achievement.

Mr. Banks: That is not what I have been told.

Mr. Faulds: I think that matter had better be dropped.

We must have differing views on this. I do not have the benefit of having met Martin Lee, but there are many like him arguing the odds to make it as difficult as they can under the transitional system. Once the transfer is achieved, however, they will be off with their passports tucked in their back pockets. There is no doubt of that at all.

There is one issue for which the British Government retain full responsibility, which they must accept and act on. There is still time for that. This is the issue that has been raised time and again this afternoon—the issue of British nationals in Hong Kong who in July 1997 will become stateless. It is no good arguing about that word; that is the position that they will be in. There are about 5,000 of them, I am told. Our spokesman on foreign

affairs mentioned 10,000. But however many thousand, there are not that many. The Select Committees on Foreign Affairs of both 1989 and 1993 recommended that full citizenship be granted to them.

I am delighted that our spokesman, the admirable right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), has made the commitment that the Labour Government, who are coming along nicely, will keep the commitment that those chaps will be allowed British citizenship. It would really be shameful if this Government, which has done a number of fairly shameful things, did not enact the required legislation. If they do not, we will. We cannot abandon those unfortunate people.

The situation is ludicrous when one compares the figures in Macau and in Hong Kong. The citizens of Macau—all 450,000 of them—are entitled to Portuguese citizenship. That Portuguese citizenship would, in principle, through the EC, give them the right of abode in the United Kingdom. We are saying no to that right for 5,000, 6,000 or 7,000 people. It is nonsense. We must in God's name provide for those last few thousand for whom we are responsible the same heartening settlement as the Portuguese Chinese are to have.

7.52 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): The hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) could not be more wrong in attacking the governorship of Christopher Patten in Hong Kong. Had the hon. Gentleman been with me recently when I went round some of the housing estates in which the ordinary people of Hong Kong live, he would have seen that Chris Patten was not just respected, but loved by the people there. He is loved because he cares for the ordinary people of Hong Kong, and they know it.

Mr. Faulds: Does not the hon. and learned Gentleman think that those are the very properties that he would have been shown?

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Precisely. That is Chris Patten's great strength, and why he commands such support in Hong Kong. The hon. Gentleman must not let the fact that he is a leading official in the Anglo-Chinese parliamentary group—

Mr. Faulds: British-Chinese.

Sir Ivan Lawrence:—British-Chinese parliamentary group blinker him to the warm feelings that exist towards Governor Patten and the respect for his achievements, his caring and his affection for the people.

Hong Kong has a particular place in the hearts of the British people. Sadly, we can do nothing to stop it being taken from us, but there is much that we can still do to reassure those who are nervous about the transfer to China. We can do much to let the people of Hong Kong know that we care, as Governor Patten cares, and that we in this place will go on caring about Hong Kong, its people, its prosperity, its rights and its liberties.

I certainly hope that this will not be the last debate on Hong Kong before the handover next year. We can give the people of Hong Kong the reassurance that we will do anything we can in the council chambers of the world to make sure that China observes its undertakings. We have almost every reason for thinking that the Chinese will honour the joint declaration and the Basic Law. If there is any indication that they will not, we in this place will go on debating the issues that we know are close to the people of Hong Kong. We will consider their case and do what we can to allay their fears.

We must be prepared to face up to China if it looks as though it is trying to assert itself. As far as I have any authority to say so as chairman of the United Kingdom branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, we will look for acceptable ways of keeping a close and continuous interest in Hong Kong, as the joint declaration gives us not only the right but the obligation so to do.

We have no concerns about the future prosperity of Hong Kong. The people of Hong Kong, their outstanding administrators and, I think, the Beijing Government will ensure that that prosperity will endure and grow. However, as today's debate has made clear, we have great concerns about the liberties and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong—concerns that we can only hope the Beijing Government understand and recognise. Every act of Chinese repression, whether of a country such as Tibet, of groups or of individuals, stops those concerns dissolving away. We hope that the Chinese Government understand why we have those concerns.

The right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) is not often right, but he was certainly right in the major part of his speech today and he was right to say that we left democracy in Hong Kong a little late. I remember debate after debate in the 1980s—those one-and-a-half-hour debates at a late hour—where I had a speech that I was never able to deliver. By the time the two Front-Bench spokesmen had opened and wound up, and a handful of Hong Kong experts called Blaker, Miller, Bray, Johnston, Whitney and others had spoken, there was never an opportunity for someone like me to speak.

I will summarise that undelivered speech in a moment or two. It said: let us get the seeds of democracy in now, not later. Let us give those seeds the time to take, in an unaccustomed soil, and grow into saplings so strong that when the cold winds of anti-democracy start blowing from the north, the saplings will be strong enough to withstand them and endure. That was my speech, but I never got anywhere near putting that message across in the Chamber, although I did what I could behind the scenes.

We did delay. We delayed too long. When we planted the seeds, we gave them too little chance to grow before the handover and the chill, cold, hard winds came. Now we can see them blowing. The provisional LegCo is to replace the duly elected LegCo, although there is no mention of it in the joint declaration or the Basic Law. It is a matter that alarms and concerns the people of Hong Kong, as it must alarm and concern us.

On the face of it, there seems to be no point in a provisional LegCo, which will undoubtedly intervene in the government of Hong Kong and generate confusion and resentment. China has never even tried to explain why it wants a provisional LegCo that will cause confusion and resentment.

Mr. Faulds: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Sir Ivan Lawrence: May I please continue?

Mr. Faulds: I would like to correct the hon. and learned Gentleman, who is so wrong.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. It rests with the hon. Member who has the Floor to decide whether to give way. I understand that the hon. and learned Gentleman is not giving way.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: If I am wrong, I wish to be corrected.

Mr. Faulds: If I heard correctly, the hon. and learned Gentleman just said that he could not understand why China had behaved as it has. I thought that I had explained rather explicitly in my speech that it was because Governor Patten aborted the through-train arrangement that China introduced the provisional council.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: No, that was not a good enough explanation.

Mr. Faulds: It is a fact.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I am afraid that the obvious explanation is that the Chinese are attempting to assert the fact that they are master, and to get in, as it were, at an early stage to make quite sure that nobody will dispute, when they take over, where that masterdom lies. That is the obvious conclusion that we must draw in the absence of any explanation other than that which the hon. Member for Warley, East, on behalf of the Chinese Government, offers.

Mr. Faulds: This is historically correct.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman seeks to intervene, he must do so in the proper way and not by a sedentary comments.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for protecting me.

I do not need to state, because it has often, and better, been stated by others, that that action alone has caused such alarm and concern that, if it grows, it will do inevitable harm to Hong Kong's long-term interests and future. I am pleased that the United Kingdom Government will continue to oppose the proposal. I am gratified that, the hon. Member for Warley, East apart, that view is common across the parties.

Then there is the cold blast that has blown from the Chinese mainland over the Bill of Rights—in an effort to reverse the amendment to the six Hong Kong ordinances. Happily, so far, it has not been proceeded with. Perhaps China is realising the depth of our concerns about civil liberties and human rights. Such actions cause shudders of alarm and concern which all the good governance of Governor Patten, and all the economic support and prosperity in Hong Kong, has not been able to deflect. I hope that we will continue to debate these matters regularly in this place so that the Government in Beijing can see that we are not letting those concerns go away, that we are not bored into apathy, that we care and will continue to care about Hong Kong and its people.

Sir Russell Johnston: The hon. and learned Gentleman is a lawyer. What does he think of the deal, agreement—however we like to describe it—about the Court of Final Appeal and the fact that the idea of having two outside judges has been cast aside in favour of having what I think is described as "one or none"?

Sir Ivan Lawrence: That is another of the cold blasts of air that send a shudder through everyone concerned. During early discussions about the matter, there was the terrible fear that the court's last place of resort would be Beijing, not Hong Kong, but I have to say that the Chinese Government showed sensitivity about the jurisdiction of the Court of Final Appeal. It is a good sign that the Beijing Government reacted positively to the deep concerns that were felt several years ago about the venue of the court. I remember spending several days in Hong Kong in the early 1980s with the then Chief Justice, who went out of his way to inculcate in me a thorough understanding of the consequences of the court's not being its own master in Hong Kong. But there is a cold wind, and it causes concern.

There is, of course, a lesser matter, which has been much canvassed this evening, but it is still important. It is a matter over which we most certainly have control: the issue of the ethnic minority. I can see how valuable the British Government's protective undertaking has been and how welcome was my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's undertaking that any ethnic minority British national in Hong Kong who is placed in fear and threat can come here, settle and, in due course, gain British citizenship. The gap between that and offering full British citizenship is very narrow.

I do not understand why the United Kingdom Government are deliberately making it appear that they do not want to be seen to be magnanimous. Why? There seems to be no purpose in it. It is such a small step. No more of the minority in Hong Kong will come here because we do the right thing than if we appear to be churlish about it. I was going to say that if we did not bridge that gap, the Labour party would promise to bridge it, and lo and behold we heard that commitment made this afternoon. We are still in power, and I hope that we will remain in power so that the Labour party's commitment will not need to be invoked. We must take our own action in this matter. I simply do not understand why we are making so much of it. As I have said, it is a small step and it begins to look churlish if we do not take it.

Why are we allowing any feeling of resentment, any feeling of disappointment, when it is so easily within our power to be seen and felt to be doing the right thing? Is there some reason that we are not being told? I say to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State that we are listening for the reason. We are interested. Do we expect the Chinese Government in Beijing to let the democratically elected LegCo remain in existence? Is that the reason? I doubt it, but if it is, let us hear about it, because if that is so it would be worth the appearance of churlishness if we were to make some other significant gain in the security and happiness of Hong Kong.

Is it perhaps that some other explanation is being held out to us, some other offer, some benefit, if we continue to appear churlish? If so, I ask my right hon. Friend to tell us so that we might understand and stop our nagging, as that is what it is beginning to sound like on this issue. We are all united here in Parliament. If there is no reason,

I have confidence that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and the Government will see the virtue of thinking again, as we did with the war widows.

For just as the Chinese intransigence over LegCo weakens confidence, so would our change of mind in this matter strengthen confidence. Let us do what we can to build up that confidence and reassurance where we can. We owe that to the people of Hong Kong.

8.7 pm

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Debates on Hong Kong have over the years tended to demonstrate the width of agreement in the House. There are exceptions to that. The recollections of the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) of debates in the 1980s seem a little incomplete. Some of us were arguing precisely what he was saying, not only in the House but in Hong Kong. My hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) has strong views on Chinese policies that he never hesitates to air, and he did so eloquently again tonight.

The speeches of the Foreign Secretary and of my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who is shadow Foreign Secretary, demonstrated the width of agreement in the House and the commitment to stand by Hong Kong. We have all been of common mind on the treatment of non-Chinese ethnic minorities. It is a quite shameful and unnecessary act to exclude them from the citizenship of this country, to which they are fully entitled.

There is another function of debates on Hong Kong in the House—to look ahead. For many years, certain words have not been spoken in Hong Kong. For many years, one such phrase was "1997". Years later, it was "elections", and then "direct elections". Now the unmentionable words are "the political impact of Hong Kong on China."

There is much talk of the political impact of China on Hong Kong. We have heard much about it in this debate. However, there is very little talk about the impact in the other direction. Hong Kong has always lived for the moment, and it has done very well as a result. It is not for British Ministers or the retiring British Governor to reflect on the future political impact of Hong Kong on China. They have no wish to make their job more difficult by seeming to interfere in China's politics.

People are thinking, however, and now—as in the past—it would be better if more people started talking about the unmentionable. People in Hong Kong fear that, if they ventilate their views on the political future of China, they and their concerns will suffer. Speaking only for myself, I think that those concerns would not suffer if hon. Members were to speak out more fully. Far from appearing a destabilising threat to China, I believe that such talk about China's political future would help it to benefit more fully from the peaceful resumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong.

Contrasting the experience of the people of the former Soviet Union, I can find no wish in the House, in the United Kingdom, in Europe or in the United States for the people of China to be destabilised in the same manner. Hong Kong has a much higher income per head than China. As many hon. Members have said, China has strong economic interests to maintain Hong Kong's prosperity. Hong Kong will be seen, however—it will want to be seen—as a honeypot in China, with all the advantages and risks that that entails.

The joint declaration and the Basic Law provide that China will levy no taxes and exact no payments from Hong Kong, and that Hong Kong will manage its own currency and monetary affairs. Only yesterday, an agreement was signed between Britain and China on the transfer of Hong Kong's foreign exchange funds—worth about $62 billion—which will be transferred, on 1 July 1997, to the Government of the Special Administrative Region. That one transaction will increase China's total foreign exchange reserves by 38 per cent. Mr. Lu Ping, head of the Hong Kong and Macao office in Beijing, said that the People's bank of China—China's central bank—will not establish any branches in Hong Kong. I believe that China will honour its commitments to non-interference in such matters.

China and Hong Kong have huge and inescapable common interests within those commitments—in the stability of the economy, in investment and in trade. There is also a common interest in resisting and rooting out corruption. Anyone who has followed Chinese history for long knows how that is a continually recurring theme in China. It has also been a major preoccupation in Hong Kong. Although the starting points and the jurisdictions are different, the fight against corruption will be much more likely to succeed if the two systems reinforce rather than weaken each other's strengths.

Hong Kong will not be responsible for foreign affairs or defence. It will not contribute to the costs of those policies, but it will be greatly affected by their results. There will be an inevitable interaction of media and communication systems. Perhaps most important of all, there will be a growing interaction of the culture, ideas, social aspirations and behaviour of people in China and those in Hong Kong.

In recent years, Hong Kong has been strengthened in its role as China's window on the world by the rapid expansion of its universities. The great national universities of China—Beijing, Qinghua and Fudan—draw their students from all the provinces of China. For understandable reasons, however, such as the higher cost of living, that is not practicable at the undergraduate level in Hong Kong. Hong Kong graduate schools, however, would be able to achieve higher standards and make a greater contribution to China, and to Hong Kong, if they recruited from all over China, and financed those students at the expense of the SAR Government.

No first-class graduate school anywhere in the world limits its recruitment to a population of only 6 million people. Recruitment of professional skills and their export to China would greatly benefit Hong Kong and China. Why should all the Chinese students want to go to America when they could be trained in professional skills as well in China and in Hong Kong?

How will people in Hong Kong play things? There will be no wish in Hong Kong to treat Beijing as a court of appeal, to which people go if they do not get their way in Hong Kong. But Beijing's support will be important in matters that cannot be settled in Hong Kong. Hong Kong has thrived as a city state. Now, it is resuming its role as an integral part—also the most rich and powerful part—of the most populous nation on earth. That is a very different role from the one it has played, with whatever great success and distinction, since the war. It will bring new opportunities and responsibilities to the people of Hong Kong.

[Dr. Jeremy Bray]

Article 21 of the Basic Law provides:

"Chinese citizens who are residents of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall be entitled to participate in the management of state affairs according to law. In accordance with the assigned number of seats and the selection method specified by the National People's Congress, the Chinese citizens among the residents of Hong Kong SAR shall locally elect deputies of the Region to the National People's Congress to participate in the work of the highest organ of state power."

In politics in Hong Kong today, the National People's Congress does not rate very highly. It is not seen as the seat of power—where the action lies—in China, and even less so in Hong Kong.

There is uncertainty about what will be the role of the other organs of government in China—particularly, after July, the role of the Communist party in Hong Kong. The official position in Beijing is that, under article 27 of the Basic Law,

"Hong Kong residents should have freedom of speech, of the press and of publication; freedom of association, of assembly, of procession and of demonstration; and the right and freedom to form and join trade unions, and to strike."

When hon. Members hear such words, they wonder how much they have to do with reality in China, which has similar words in its constitution, as it had before Tiananmen. The question is not what interpretation was or is given to such words in China, but how those words will be interpreted in the jurisdiction of Hong Kong's courts, as they will function there.

The interpretation of "freedom of association" by Beijing seems to be that anyone in Hong Kong will be able to form political parties. If people wish to establish the Communist party or to join it in Hong Kong, they can do so. Anything can be read into that. It seems a little unlikely, however, that the party will be constituted as a dual channel of government in Hong Kong as it is in China.

Under the joint declaration and the Basic Law, those provisions under the banner of "one country, two systems" will remain unchanged for 50 years—but only for 50 years. That seems a long time but, in the perspective of Chinese history, 50 years soon passes. Even in the history of Hong Kong, it is 33 years since I called for the first debate in the House on the future of Hong Kong. It was a Back-Bench-initiated debate on the Easter Adjournment in 1963.

I said then that the future peace and prosperity of Hong Kong after 1997 depended on its economic integration with south China. Thanks to the initiative of Hong Kong people, and of people in China, that integration has happened, is happening and will go on happening for many years to come. It remains the best guarantee for Hong Kong in the next few years.

Over the next 50 years, which will pass very quickly—they represent only the lifetime of those who are now starting their adult lives in Hong Kong—the best interests of Hong Kong and China will be secured if the people of Hong Kong are able to contribute effectively to the politics of China itself.

As we hand sovereignty over Hong Kong to China, one demonstration of good government that we have still to make is the tidying up of the problems which have been the main preoccupation of today's debate. The issue on which Governor Patten has been touring Europe and the case for visa-free entry of SAR passport holders to Europe would be greatly strengthened if the UK Government were a bit firmer in their own commitments to the non-Chinese ethnic minorities.

As for the Legislative Council, it is, of course, a matter of great regret that it was not possible to reach agreement with China on the through train, but the election of the Chief Executive is proceeding precisely according to the Basic Law. I must say, it is going ahead with far greater openness than I had expected, and there has been active canvassing and a readiness to stand on the part of four substantial figures in Hong Kong who, in the language in which we used to talk about elections in Hong Kong in the 1970s and 1980s, would never have let their names go forward for fear of the loss of face. However, we are through that phase now and are witnessing in Hong Kong a readiness on the part of the Government of the People's Republic to see Hong Kong as showing the way ahead, for politics not just in Hong Kong but in China.

8.22 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): When I visited Hong Kong in September with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegation, I was interested to note a change from the mood of 1995, when everything seemed to be slipping away as the Governor presided over a steady loss of authority. This year, there was a mood of almost obligatory optimism. The atmosphere was one of "We've come through" and everyone breathed a sigh of relief because they would be handing over an efficient, functioning machine.

What worried me was that no substantial concern was expressed, other than in the Legislative Council, about what amounts to the removal of the basis of a sustainable and viable democracy on the through train into Chinese rule. That seems to me a curious failure, because democracy is central to maintaining the unique position of Hong Kong. After all, what makes Hong Kong unique and, in a sense, impregnable? What gives it its strength?

The Government's assumption throughout this debate—and, indeed, for years—is that Hong Kong's uniqueness is its economic strength, and that China needs Hong Kong's economic dynamo, its market access and its access to capital. However, as time goes on and as China develops—the speed of growth in China, and especially in competing centres such as Canton and Shanghai, is phenomenal, and much more rapid than that of Hong Kong itself, which has been comparatively slow for the past couple of years because the dollar seems to be over-valued—Hong Kong becomes comparatively less important. It becomes just another player in what amounts to a regional competition within China. The tendency must be towards increasing regionalisation and increasing competition between the regions. In such circumstances, competing cities will want Hong Kong's airport and container port for themselves, to develop them in their own way.

Another basis for Hong Kong's strength was always assumed to be that, thanks to the settlements with China, it had access to the top of the Chinese leadership. However, that is no longer the case. The agreements were made because of the authority of Deng Xiaoping. He had the strength to impose those agreements and ensure that they were carried out. He was committed—I am sorry to

speak of him in the past tense, but, in the sense of active leadership, it is perhaps appropriate to do so—to sustaining those agreements. That was the basis of Hong Kong's independence, uniqueness and authority.

There is no longer that authoritative leadership; instead, there is a struggle for power and competing leaders. In that competition, Hong Kong becomes a pawn in a power play at the Chinese centre. Hong Kong is in danger of being interfered with. There is a danger that regional administrators and cadres will get their sticky fingers on Hong Kong and that it will no longer have the right of appeal on the strength of the centre that it did have. There is danger in the erosion of Hong Kong's uniqueness and in the acceptance of an increased population, because China is characterised by a massive drift to the cities. How is Hong Kong to stop the attempt to get at its capital?

The concept of one nation, two systems was designed not for Hong Kong but for Taiwan, which has a much greater population. It does not give Hong Kong strength in the system—it has a population of 6.3 million, compared to Taiwan's much greater population—to sustain itself and maintain its uniqueness. What gives Hong Kong its strength is surely democracy. That is what we should have been strengthening to hand on to China.

The phenomenal economic development of Hong Kong is based on the fact that it is a safe, stable island in an unpredictable world, and that it had a powerful and unpredictable neighbour—unpredictable, because authoritarian. All authoritarian regimes are unpredictable. There were abrupt changes in policy under Mao Tse Tung—his era personified unpredictability. Hong Kong has been insulated from that by the rule of law—commercial law, law enforced by independent courts and an uncorrupted civil service.

All that was based initially on British authority, but, as British authority recedes, it has to be based on the legitimacy of an elected Legislative Council—in other words, democratic legitimacy—which makes that uniqueness and rule of law sustainable, so that it can be handed on. It was not as democratic as we would have wished. It was always a question of too little, too late, but it is fair to say that democracy was conceded so slowly to Hong Kong because of a desire not to offend China in the Mao Tse Tung era. It is not altogether the fault of the British Government, although they should have gone further and faster when they had the opportunity.

Yet the Chinese use a minor extension of collegiate democracy by Governor Patten—not the fact of that minor extension, but the failure to consult—as an excuse to stop the democratic through train of the Legislative Council. I think that that is the key to a series of threats to Hong Kong. Once China had said that it would not accept that extension of democracy, we should have gone the whole hog and introduced universal suffrage. Why not? It is the only viable alternative. A vote to that effect was almost carried by the Legislative Council.

We did not do that, so let us start from where we are now. China has stopped the through train. It has said that it will abolish the Legislative Council and create an appointed council—many such problems of overlap have been dealt with today. The joint declaration, which has the force of a treaty, guarantees constitutional government by a Legislative Council constituted by elections. Abolishing that council violates the joint declaration.

Why have we not made that specific point frequently, ramming it down the throats of the Chinese Government and taking it to every available international forum or court? The Chinese have rejected a basic component of a treaty. Why have we not taken that up with the United Nations? Why have we not got the European Union, as a body, to give its backing to this critique of the Chinese Government and to demand guarantees that democracy will be sustained in Hong Kong?

Other creeping failures follow from that failure to resist the abrupt derailment of the through train. A repeal of the Bill of Rights has been announced, together with possible restrictions on democratic dissent, with the Chinese Foreign Minister inviting dissidents to leave, saying that no political activities that go against the leadership in China will be allowed. Restrictions have been proposed on the freedom of the press—the Chinese Foreign Minister said that newspapers will not be able to spread "rumours" about the Chinese leadership. If British newspapers were prevented from spreading rumours about our present leadership, there would be blank pages in every newspaper.

Basic democratic freedoms are crumbling away, because the removal of the freedom underpinning them all—the existence of a democratically elected Legislative Council—has been tacitly accepted by the British Government. They have not protested as effectively and vigorously as they should have done. Democracy, the rule of law and the freedom of the press are all encrustations on the teapot, as one Chinese leader put it. The teapot has effectively been smashed. The Legislative Council might have been the spout of the teapot, but all those freedoms were essential to underpin the rule of law, which has been the basis of Hong Kong's success.

It is worrying to see the press begin to kow-tow to the Chinese leadership, including the mogadonisation of the *South China Evening Post*. We have seen business men one after another making accommodations with the Chinese Government. The Chief Justice has stood down from his job and attacked the legislative enactment of rights. It is depressing that the candidates for the position of Chief Executive are all silent on the abolition of the Legislative Council, and are all jostling for indications of support from Beijing rather than for any indication of support from the people of Hong Kong, who, on the evidence of the polls, manifestly prefer Anson Chan to any of those putting themselves forward.

It is depressing to see Members of the Legislative Council having to choose whether to participate in the provisional council. Half of them—the unelected half, as has been pointed out—have said that they will. The democratically elected half are then placed in a very difficult position, because their platform and the basis of their support is democracy. Through the failure of the press to cover the Democratic party and the critics of the regime, those opponents are, bit by bit, losing their contact with the people, which is their lifeline. Non-participation in the arrangements relegates them to a position of impotence that will worsen over the years. All that is disastrous.

All those wide-ranging consequences stem from our failure to contest by every means at our disposal and in every world forum the abolition of the Legislative Council and the derailing of the through train. Democracy must be

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

the basis of the legitimacy, the independence, the effectiveness and the strength of the system, because it involves the people—it is their system.

We are witnessing the effective abolition of democracy. The system may have been somewhat inadequate, but it was the beginning of democracy, and it would have been widened over time. That democracy needs to be expanded, improved and made more widespread, to preserve the basis of Hong Kong's strength—its uniqueness and its attachment to the rule of law, based on the legitimacy conferred by democratic elections.

8.35 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) referred to the old expression, "one nation, two systems". Having seen Hong Kong and China, I think that Hong Kong has the socialist system. I have been fortunate in being able to visit Hong Kong twice in the past three years. It is a truly remarkable place, as all those who have been there say.

A number of thoughts occur to me when I return to my own city. After coming back from New York, London's buildings always seem small. When I come back from Hong Kong, London seems deserted of people.

No one can fail to admire the achievements of the people of Hong Kong, but, as we have already heard, those achievements have not come about through unregulated, rapacious capitalism, as those who have never been there often claim. I was very impressed with the social housing provision and with the education and health provision, all of which are extensive and of a high standard. I saw far fewer beggars on the streets and far fewer people huddling in doorways in Hong Kong than I see in London, not many yards from the Palace of Westminster. Let us be clear—Hong Kong is not a triumph of monetarism and rapacious capitalism; it is a triumph of planning and regulation, as well as of energy on the part of the people.

Hong Kong may still be a Crown colony, but it is far more prosperous than the so-called sovereign power of the United Kingdom. Its GDP per head is $23,210. Hong Kong is well ahead of the United Kingdom, and there is much that we could learn from it. I find it fascinating that we could be the ringmasters while all that has been going on in Hong Kong, yet we cannot achieve that level of success over here. That is one of the great problems of politics which will no doubt for ever defeat me.

When I was in Hong Kong, I met a wide cross-section of politicians, business people and civil servants. I kept extensive notebooks, which have been useful for cross-checking for this debate. Not surprisingly, the views of the people I met on the possibilities for the future of Hong Kong after 30 June 1997 varied considerably. Obviously, pro-Beijing politicians were utterly convinced that everything would be fine and dandy after 30 June. They would, wouldn't they?

What particularly appalled me was the significant body of opinion among business leaders in Hong Kong, who openly said that they positively detested Governor Patten and his 1992 democratic package. We all know why—they felt that it disturbed relations with China. They were absolutely right. Beijing is not keen on pluralist democracy. They also said—I made a careful note of the names of these business leaders—that most people in Hong Kong were not interested in democracy. That is often the view of people who are interested only in making money—they are not interested in political structures.

This was the authentic manifesto of so much of big business throughout the world. For these captains of industry, these aggressive tigers of capitalism, democracy is a bore. Most of them do not give a damn about it. What is more, they think that dissidents and radical individuals and groups are an embarrassment—an impediment to business. Thirdly, they themselves will do business with anyone, however murderous or authoritarian. Unfortunately, I found those to be the views of a significant element of the business community in Hong Kong.

The trouble with such a philosophy is that it is doomed in the long term. Corrupt political systems inevitably produce corrupt economic systems. Honest business—if that is not an oxymoron—cannot long survive with a crooked Government. It is just possible for crooked business to try to survive under an honest Government, but if that Government are honest they will, of course, move rapidly to deal with crooked business men.

The general absence of corruption in Hong Kong has been admired by all in this House tonight and in previous debates, but it is based on the rule of law, an independent judiciary, human rights and press freedoms. No one who has observed the events of recent years in China can have any confidence that such a climate of political freedom and human rights as is currently enjoyed in Hong Kong will endure after June 1997. I wish I could say otherwise, but that is how I feel. When we come to read these debates in future, we shall see who was right, the pessimists or the optimists.

The House does not need to take my word for China's attitude to press freedom and human rights. The Governor himself has expressed fears about press freedom, and China's Foreign Secretary said in an interview given to *The Asian Wall Street Journal* on 16 October of this year that the media in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

"can put forward criticism, but not rumours or lies. Nor can they put forward personal attacks on the Chinese leaders."

He also argued:

"in future, Hong Kong should not hold those political activities which directly interfere in the affairs of the mainland of China."

That was taken as a reference to the annual commemoration ceremonies in Hong Kong for those who died in Tiananmen square in 1989, and to the protests held in support of dissidents in China.

Naturally enough, there was a strong reaction to this interview. Amnesty International complained:

"by giving their clearest warning to date that they will not tolerate commemorations in Hong Kong of the Beijing massacre, the Chinese authorities appear to be playing a game of intimidation."

These comments appear to reflect a decision in Beijing to raise the political stakes in relation to human rights issues and tighten the limits of Hong Kong's autonomy in this area.

We have heard that China will want to ensure that the Hong Kong goose continues to lay the golden eggs; but I am equally convinced that Beijing thinks that Hong

Kong's position as an economic powerhouse can be maintained without the political freedoms that it currently enjoys.

During the Secretary of State's speech, we heard a lot of wishful thinking. I do not share his trust in pieces of paper when the signatures on them are those of Chinese politicians. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) takes a completely different view; he certainly has a way with words. I am quite content to wait and let time be the judge. My hon. Friend will not be a member of this place by then, but I shall make the odyssey to Warley, East to tell him who was right—I suppose the eastern part of Warley is the bit nearest China. Then we will revisit this evening's debate, and see who was right.

Hoping that China will not go back on the joint declaration is rather like hoping that it will not snow in Siberia this winter.

Mr. Faulds: Nonsense.

Mr. Banks: We shall have to wait and see. The Beijing Government have already made their intentions quite clear, and we should take the warnings seriously. In a debate in this House in 1984, Geoffrey Howe, the then Foreign Secretary, said:

"First, the joint declaration and its annexes constitute a legally binding international agreement . . . the joint declaration is a form of international treaty; it has the same force in international law and is legally binding . . . It provides for the administration of Hong Kong to be in local hands and for the Executive to be accountable to an elected legislature. It provides for judicial power to be exercised independently and for a public service in which appointment and promotion will depend on qualifications, experience and ability."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 391-92.]

The Chinese premier has reiterated China's determination to sweep away Hong Kong's elected legislature and replace it with one appointed by Beijing. Indeed, its members—400 of them—are already in place on Beijing's selection committee. On 11 December, that committee will choose a new Chief Executive, and towards the end of December it will select an appointed provisional legislature to operate simultaneously with the elected Legislative Council, which, as we know, was elected in 1994 for a four-year period. That is a clear breach of the joint declaration, so we want to know what the British Government intend to do about it.

The Foreign Secretary says that we must wait and see—but we already know what will happen; the timetable is as good as written. It is too late to wait until everything is in place and then start protesting. Time is of the essence.

What authority will LegCo be able to exercise in the shadow of a puppet legislature set up by China? What will the British Government do about the situation due to emerge in December? The joint declaration is an international agreement. The elected legislature is crucial to that declaration, and it has certainly been breached and will continue to be breached. The British Government must therefore act.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby said that we should involve the international community in condemning China's breach of the joint declaration. We should also refer it to the International Court of Justice. China, of course, will not submit to that court, but at least we can embarrass the Chinese Government. Or perhaps we could refer the whole matter to the Hong Kong High Court, while it still enjoys its current powers.

I have a direct question for the Minister: will the Government do this? Do they intend to wait for the appointed legislature to be set up next month and then deliver a mild protest to Beijing? Merely ignoring the situation would be a betrayal of Hong Kong's people and a sell-out to China. It would render worthless all the guarantees we have heard about tonight.

After June 1997, it is also clear that Beijing intends to emasculate Hong Kong's Bill of Rights, the fundamental guarantee of what we have all been praising—Hong Kong's human rights and political and press freedoms. They are all enshrined in the Bill. Once it goes, Hong Kong's courts, however independent, will lose their powers to strike down laws that conflict with the freedoms enshrined in the Bill of Rights. That, too, will be a clear breach by China of guarantees given.

There is one point on which I will join hands with my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East—

Mr. Faulds: You are right for once.

Mr. Banks: Just hands on this occasion, I think.

Mr. Faulds: What else is on offer?

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend tempts me down paths of lasciviousness that I do not want to explore just now. Perhaps he could see me later.

The British should have discovered the joys of democracy in Hong Kong a long time before they did. That is why I can understand China's suspicions about what appears to be a deathbed conversion. I feel some sympathy for her on that. It is never too late for democracy. That being so, we must be prepared to defend it vigorously in the months left to us before 30 June.

I should like to say a word about Martin Lee, chairman of the Democratic party of Hong Kong, whom my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East abused most unfairly. The Democratic party of Hong Kong won 19 of the 20 seats for independent candidates. I looked at my notes of my conversation with Martin Lee in 1993. He referred to the OBE clause, which will allow a number of politicians to get the hell out, with guaranteed entry into this country. He is not one of those who will use it. He has made it clear, and reiterated it when I met him yesterday and the day before, that he intends to stay in Hong Kong after 30 June 1997. I say to my hon. Friend that Mr. Lee could find himself in gaol. Such things must be remembered.

There are a number of very brave politicians. It is easy to be critical and stand up and slag off the Government in this country. Opposition Members make a profession of it, because we do not have to fear the knock at the door at night or be worried about being dragged off and put away for years without trial. Hong Kong is currently able to enjoy such freedoms, as we are, but I am worried that it will not be able to do so after 30 June 1997. Let us praise brave politicians like Martin Lee and Christine Loh.

When the Government are considering the final wrap-up ceremonies and travel arrangements for June 1997, will they ensure that they book fully refundable, and certainly fully transferable, air tickets? I know that a Labour, not a Conservative, Foreign Secretary will be representing the British Government and the British people at that ceremony. I only hope that a Labour

[Mr. Banks]

Government will be far more robust in looking critically at what happens after June 1997 than the Conservative Government have been in the run-up to it.

8.51 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): I should like to begin by offering the apologies of my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the shadow Foreign Secretary, who has had to leave the House this evening because of another commitment. He has already given his apologies to the Government Front-Bench team and would like them to be conveyed to the rest of the House. He has gone to Paris with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition to meet President Chirac. For the sake of the French Government, I hope that the visit is more fruitful than the one that my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston made last week, when he arrived in Pakistan and immediately the Government fell. I hope that he does not have quite the same impact during other visits throughout Europe and the world.

I suspect that the House of Commons will be able to hold up this debate with some pride and self-satisfaction. Over the next few months, we shall all be criticised for going in for cheap soundbites and cheap politics, and perhaps, occasionally, we shall be accused of boring the electorate, although I am sure that that will never be our intention. The debate has been serious and important and has shown the House of Commons performing a task that does not often grab the public limelight, but which is crucial to our democracy and to the notion of accountability in that democracy.

It has been a good night for Parliament and, to make what may be one of my few non-consensual points, if I may say so, it has also been a good night for the Labour party. Labour Members have kept the debate going and shown a greater interest in the Government's handling of Hong Kong than Government Back Benchers. That may well be the point on which my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks) concluded.

We recognise that two crucial events will take place next year. One is already preordained for 1 July and the other is more or less certain to happen on 1 May. A Labour Government will be responsible for the United Kingdom's foreign policy when Hong Kong returns to China. It was good to see the extent of Labour interest, which I have no doubt will continue to be shown by my hon. Friends in future. Even if my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) is not with us in future deliberations on Hong Kong, I have no doubt that his presence will be felt and perhaps his voice heard. *[Interruption.]* It is always a great pleasure to witness the degree of unanimity on the Benches behind me and the warm, comradely gestures and comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Warley, East and for Newham, North-West.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) said that he hoped—quite rightly—that this would not be the last debate on Hong Kong in this Parliament. It clearly will not. We have a continuing role, which may even assume greater importance after 1 July. The hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) said that it might be sensible to give a Select Committee the responsibility of looking at future events in Hong Kong. I would be a little reluctant about the detail of that proposal, but I wholly go along with his suggestion that we need to ensure that whatever happens is regularly reported to the House and debated on the Floor.

Mr. Rowlands: Perhaps I should defend the interests of the Foreign Affairs Committee, of which I am a member, by saying that it shows constant interest in Hong Kong. As well as the reports that it produces, it holds hearings and a series of very interesting informal meetings fairly constantly. I assure my hon. Friend that the Committee would be a watchful watchdog.

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend makes a very good argument for there being no need for an additional Select Committee. We already have the structures in place, and the Foreign Affairs Committee already does a very good job.

What emerged from the debate was quite interesting. The debate could have taken a particular form; it could have included an element of justifiable British pride in the success story of Hong Kong. The right hon. Member for Mid–Sussex (Mr. Renton) said that we have been the lessees of Hong Kong. During the period that we have been the lessees, we have had a tremendous record of success. It is worth reminding ourselves, as so many have in the debate, of the nature of that success.

Several hon. Members commented on the thriving nature of the Hong Kong economy, but there are different interpretations of and arguments about how that success has been achieved. One thing is clear: there has been success for the Hong Kong economy. Four elements have been important in that success, to which each Back Bencher and both Front-Bench spokesmen referred. They are: respect for the rule of law, an impartial civil service, a free and vibrant press and the freedom of speech and of assembly. Those four characteristics are important to the creation of a way of life in Hong Kong that has been supportive of its economic success.

It would be remiss of us not to take the final opportunity in this debate to thank some of those who have served in the Hong Kong civil service and who have ensured that it has operated impartially and without corruption. In particular, it is most appropriate to put on record our thanks to and appreciation of the work of Anson Chan as the chief executive in Hong Kong. Her work as head of the civil service has been especially important for the success of Hong Kong.

The vibrant elements of Hong Kong's way of life have been emphasised in all the speeches that have been made today. In the debate, hon. Members not only have said that we have succeeded, but have asked an important question. They have asked not what we shall leave on 30 June 1997, but what will remain of that on 30 June 2007. The real British contribution to Hong Kong will be our ability to ensure that the institutions that we have built and the successes that we have achieved remain in 10 years' time and beyond. That is the test for us as the House of Commons and it is, above all, a test for the Government.

Two items of unfinished business came through from all the contributions. First, concern was expressed on both sides about the future of the ethnic minority communities. Indeed, so great was the consensus that so far there has

been only one contribution outside the consensus—that of the Foreign Secretary. Everybody else has argued that there is a need to give passports and British citizenship to the ethnic minority communities.

The Government's argument is that the Prime Minister has made a promise that, in exceptional circumstances, members of the ethnic minority communities will be given the right of abode in the United Kingdom and the right to come to the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, that promise of exceptional circumstances is not a subjective test: it is an objective test when the individual makes an application in Hong Kong to come to the United Kingdom. That is a crucial point, because those of us who have had considerable constituency experience of dealing with entry clearance matters know that sometimes what we would consider to be a good case for political asylum, with a strong and exceptional set of circumstances, is turned down by entry clearance officials. When that happens in the context of Hong Kong, the individual will face a double jeopardy in the circumstances of the Prime Minister's promise.

The individual will have exposed himself by saying that he wants to leave Hong Kong to come to the United Kingdom, because in so doing he will have said that he is faced with exceptional problems. If that objective test is not met and the officials say that the circumstances are not exceptional, the individual will face the double jeopardy of having to stay in Hong Kong, having said that it is difficult for him to live there. I do not think that anybody in the House would want to find himself or herself in those circumstances, and that is why I simply cannot understand the Government's position.

If the promise of exceptional circumstances is an absolute guarantee—as the Foreign Secretary tried to say earlier—that guarantee can be given only if the definition of exceptional circumstances is subjective, that is, the circumstances are exceptional as perceived by the individual making the application. If that is so, there is no reason why the Government cannot go a stage further and make passports and citizenship available to the individual, because that also is a subjective and not an objective test. While the Government put hurdles in the way of individual applicants, there is a danger that some individuals will find themselves in even more difficult circumstances.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston made an offer to the Government. I hope that the Minister of State, when he comes to reply, will see that that offer was not only made in sincerity but reflects a consensus in this debate and of informed opinion outside the House. I hope that the Government and the Minister will respond tonight by saying that they will bring forward the necessary legislation and, if not, that they will give a promise to an incoming Labour Government that they will not jeopardise any future legislation to carry out our promise.

The second item of unfinished business was the concern expressed by all right hon. and hon. Members about the arrangements for representative democracy and the protection of human rights in Hong Kong. Those are the very elements that I have just mentioned—the elements that everybody accepts are crucial to Hong Kong's way of life.

Every hon. Member who has spoken has taken the opportunity to praise the courage, integrity and commitment of LegCo Members. The crucial factor that has emerged is not simply singing the praises of the individuals and of the institutions that have been created, nor is it damning the provisional council and saying that it has no basis in law or in the joint declaration. We can say those things; they are important, but self-evident. But the crucial question is: what is the Government's intention for the future, including the next few months?

It is ridiculous for the Foreign Secretary to pretend, as he did in his opening speech, that what is to happen in fewer than 30 days' time—the creation of the provisional council in Hong Kong—somehow will not happen. He implied that somewhere in his bag, or up the Minister of State's sleeve, is a trick that will persuade the Chinese Government not to go ahead with the plans that they have talked about for some time. In the context of our relationship with China, it is living in cloud cuckoo land to believe that.

It is important for the Government to come clean and be honest about what may happen. Surely they must know, and they must tell the House, that the circumstances in which the Patten reforms became unacceptable to the Chinese Government were predictable. If those circumstances were predicted by others, why have the Government not come forward with contingency plans and told us what they intend to do?

The key point for the Minister of State when he winds up will be not simply to tell us again what everybody knows and has already said—that LegCo has done a good job and that we are fearful about the future—but to tell us what the Government intend to do. The situation in which we now find ourselves is not of the making of LegCo Members or of Members of the House of Commons in general; it is of the Government's making. It is their responsibility, and we need to know what they intend to do about the future.

Those are the two items of unfinished business that I hope the Minister will deal with when he replies to the debate.

I believe that it was the right hon. Member for Mid–Sussex who said that the 21st century may be the century of the Chinese nation, which will then be the most important single nation. That is a matter for debate and for academic speculation. None of us will be around to make a judgment about whether the forecast proves true.

However, one thing that we already know about China is that its economic reforms have been remarkably successful. The compound growth figures from 1988 to the forecast for 1997 show China's annual growth rate to be 9.9 per cent., which makes it the fastest growing economy in the Asian region. So there is economic success, and that has brought with it consumer choice. For the new consumers under the new economic liberalisation in China, there is a new life style with new opportunities.

However, we would be foolish not to recognise that that economic success does not come without difficulties for China. Certain aspects must be managed. The gross regional disparities within China are a cause of potential political instability. So is the obvious inconsistency between greater economic freedom and political centralism. The tension in that relationship will have an important effect on the future direction of China and on the role that it plays in the world.

Whether or not the right hon. Member for Mid–Sussex is correct about the 21st century belonging to China, one thing is abundantly clear—that the United Kingdom and

[Mr. Fatchett]

China have a unique relationship for the future. That relationship is figured around the triangle of China, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom. That relationship will change, but it gives Britain a specific and important relationship with China for decades to come.

A key question emerges from the debate: how will we make that relationship work? My right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston rightly said that we cannot do so by isolating China culturally and economically. We need to talk to China, to work with China and to build up trade and cultural relationships. There is much more that we can do in that regard: much more that could be contributed by British cities twinning with cities in China and understanding one other's way of life, and much more that could be done, as the right hon. Member for Mid-Sussex said, by building on the work of the British Council so that it can make the type of contribution that it uniquely makes in many parts of the world.

We cannot develop a relationship with China by believing that we can isolate China. We must work constructively, but it is crucial for us to recognise and respect the fact that there is concern throughout the world about China's record on human rights. We have a moral obligation to draw attention to that record. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston said, he and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition have taken every available opportunity to raise individual cases. I know that the Minister of State has done so, as have the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister. It was sad that, when the Deputy Prime Minister visited China, he felt that trade was more important than raising individual cases of human rights.

We should never miss the opportunity to draw attention to human rights issues, because in so doing we convey an important message to China—not that we believe in isolation, but that China can play its part in the world through its economic strength only by accepting that there are international standards of behaviour and that a crucial standard is that a country's internal democracy should respect human rights.

We have a common interest with China in the future of Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, Britain has £80 billion of assets, and China has 20 per cent. of its future gross domestic product. It would be foolish and incorrect of us to believe that it is not in China's interest to make a success of Hong Kong. It was said many times in the debate that, for China, the principle of "one country, two systems" is important, not only because of Hong Kong but because of Taiwan. China can achieve its second national objective, to reintegrate Taiwan—the first being to reintegrate Hong Kong—only if it succeeds in managing Hong Kong, and success in managing Hong Kong is success in preserving not only Hong Kong's economic success, but the aspects of the way of life that were mentioned often in the debate.

China has a clear interest, and so does Britain. The House of Commons' interest in Hong Kong does not finish with tonight's debate or at any time in the run-up to 30 June 1997. We have an on-going interest in carrying out the commitments that we agreed under the joint declaration. Moreover, what Britain does in Hong Kong and for the people of Hong Kong after 1 July 1997 may be more important to the way in which people perceive Britain than what we have done in the preceding years. We must fulfil a set of obligations. That set of obligations will say much about this country and our willingness to fight for principles and values that we consider important. It will not always be an easy relationship. It will not be easy to develop the tactics and strategy that we must adopt, and it will not be easy in terms of our relations with China. But the values that we consider important and the values that we have given to Hong Kong are the very values that we should fight and work for in the future.

This has been an important debate, and it has shown that we all have a long-term interest in Hong Kong. One thing that has come out of the debate is a message to the people of Hong Kong that, regardless of which party is in government in this country, Hong Kong will remain a British interest and priority. We shall continue to ensure that we do our best by the people of Hong Kong. When we have achieved so much so far, it would be wrong and foolish to throw it away. Our belief in economic and democratic freedom should be the belief that we take forward in managing our relations with China after 1 July 1997.

9.15 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): The hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) said that this has been an important debate, and it has been important not only for the occasion—I still hope that this will not be the last debate on Hong Kong before 30 June, but time will tell—but for the diversity of wisdom and experience from hon. Members from all parties. It has been important also as it has shown the absolute firmness and unity of purpose of the House in its commitment to Hong Kong and its peoples as they approach the momentous changes of the year ahead.

The only dissenting voice—as the hon. Member for Leeds, Central pointed out—was the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds), who voiced his uncritical support for the Chinese, but even he joined the House in its unwavering support for Hong Kong. That support—much in evidence this evening—has been one of the great strengths of our policy ever since the joint declaration was signed. It is a source of comfort to the people of Hong Kong, who are dealing with the anxieties and uncertainties that naturally face them, that this House of Commons regards Hong Kong in a special way and will continue to do so.

I regret that the House is not more full this evening, and I would not like people watching from near or far to think that the House does not have a commitment to Hong Kong because of the numbers present. There are many and different pressures upon each hon. Member, particularly as our own general election is not far away. Therefore, I believe that there is a deep interest in Hong Kong in the House, and that it is shared in another place and in the country as a whole. Hong Kong is not just a part of our history, it is a part of our present and our future.

There has been co-operation with China on many recent transitional issues, and that co-operation has improved in recent months. Economic and social fundamentals in Hong Kong are sound, as has been said in the debate. In addition, there are inevitable anxieties about whether China can deliver fully on the "one country, two systems" principle, and about China's plans for the provisional

legislature to which I shall refer later. The key decisions on the future Chief Executive and his team have been mentioned, and it is vital that nothing is done during this crucial period to undermine Hong Kong's stability or prosperity.

The overall message on the handover is that there are grounds for cautious optimism, provided that all parties—but especially the incoming sovereign power—are willing to continue to work for a successful transition on the basis of a full implementation of the letter and the spirit of the joint declaration.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear during his visit to Hong Kong in March this year, Britain will continue to have a strong commitment to Hong Kong well beyond 1997. The joint liaison group will continue to operate, as has been said, until 1 January 2000, and undertakings in the joint declaration will last for 50 years, until 2047, and even then I doubt whether there will be any diminution of interest in Hong Kong in the House. There will still be more than 3 million British passport holders in the territory, 1,000 British firms operating and tens of billions of pounds of investments; it is our second largest Asian export market.

I have heard, as we all have, some sad comments about the Governor. I do not believe that his policies have prevented greater progress on Hong Kong issues; I believe that we have made substantial advances with the Chinese over the past two years on a wide range of transitional issues, against a background of generally improving Sino-British relationships and intensified ministerial contacts. The Governor has been a key player in formulating our policy and he continues to enjoy the Government's full support; he is an excellent advocate for the territory's interests, and he and we have made it clear that he will remain firmly in charge until the handover.

The Government are committed to moving ahead on Hong Kong issues in co-operation with the Chinese, whenever possible, but that does not mean co-operation simply for its own sake: there is no prospect of Britain changing its fundamental policies towards Hong Kong merely in order to make life with the Chinese easier.

We have a strong political and moral obligation to the people of Hong Kong to govern the territory effectively until the transfer of sovereignty, and to work for full implementation of the joint declaration. We shall not hesitate to stand up for Hong Kong when we believe that it is right to do so; the people of Hong Kong would not forgive us, nor would it be to our commercial or any other advantage, if we did.

Earlier, I found myself in the unusual position of endorsing much of what was said by the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) in a speech that was notable for its measured and welcome statesmanship. I find myself agreeing with him rather more often than I expected, because the foreign policies of both Front Benches are often in parallel. Of course, there were points with which I disagreed fundamentally, and I shall be glad to answer the detailed points raised by him and by the hon. Member for Leeds, Central in his excellent closing speech.

Many hon. Members have referred to the fears of the non-Chinese ethnic minorities in Hong Kong that they will be left stateless after the handover. The Government are aware of those fears, but we have taken steps to provide them with the assurances to which they are entitled; that is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister promised them in March that they had an absolute, cast-iron guarantee of admission to, and settlement in, the United Kingdom if ever they came under pressure to leave Hong Kong.

We have made it clear that "pressure to leave" is intended to be a flexible term and I am convinced that future Ministers would not interpret it narrowly. We have also made it clear that evidence of discrimination would be relevant in determining whether an individual had come under pressure to leave, but there is nothing restrictive about the definition.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will accept that nobody is seeking to impugn his, still less the Prime Minister's, good faith, but it is not sufficient merely to give such assurances when we could give to the tiny number of people involved a cast-iron guarantee. That point has been emphasised in speech after speech from both Government and Opposition Members; there have been differences of opinion in the debate, but I do not think that there has been a single dissension on that point. Will he please bear that in mind and talk to the Prime Minister about it?

Mr. Hanley: I hear my hon. Friend; if I may, I will continue with my speech and bear what he says in mind.

I want to make two things clear. First, there is no question of those people becoming stateless. They will all have some form of British nationality; of that there is no doubt. Nor is there any doubt that they have an absolute unconditional right of abode in Hong Kong. That is what the Basic Law provides and what China has always promised.

Secondly, reports in the media and on the "Today" programme this morning about Her Majesty the Queen's involvement have been inaccurate and unhelpful. A letter from an official at Buckingham palace made it clear that Her Majesty would not intervene in a matter such as this which was for Ministers, to whom it was referred. No opinion whatsoever on the substance of the issue was offered or implied.

We acknowledge the concerns that have been expressed about the future of the individuals concerned in Hong Kong. However, given the guarantees that have been offered, I honestly do not think that the fears are justified. Again, I hear what my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) said. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, who cannot be here tonight and has offered his apologies to the right hon. Member for Livingston because he, too, has a diplomatic engagement this evening, made it clear that the guarantees given by the Prime Minister were sufficient for that group. We therefore do not believe that there is a need to go further. I know that people will read the reports of the debate and I shall put them before others. Our policy is clear. We believe that that group of people need not fear. We shall adhere to our promises.

Mr. Fatchett: Will the Minister confirm that the British nationality held by the ethnic minority community will not give them the right to enter the United Kingdom for the purposes of settlement and therefore is, in this context, irrelevant? Will he also confirm that the Government are offering an objective test that does not

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depend on the individual subjectively saying that he or she is subject to exceptional circumstances in the way that the Prime Minister described? If he confirms both those points, the promise that he and his Government have given the ethnic minority communities is not worth the paper that it is written on.

Mr. Hanley: As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said earlier, to go into any closer or more fine definition would not aid the people concerned but would limit the definition. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has stated that if anyone had reason to feel that they should leave Hong Kong, they would be generously considered. That generosity is a wide generosity. We have said time and again that Ministers will be as generous as the Prime Minister's intention has been. To narrow the definition would not further help that group. We have given an open guarantee that should those people come under pressure to leave Hong Kong—we intend that as a flexible term that should not be interpreted narrowly—they would be allowed to come to this country and would then have right of abode.

Mr. Fatchett: I fear that we shall make no progress this side of a general election. I put to the Minister the offer that I and my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) made that, if there is a change of Government, a Labour Government will introduce legislation. Will he give a commitment that his party will not impede that legislation?

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary made our position plain. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman really believes that the question of co-operating with a Bill proposed by some future Labour Government is one to which I would respond. I do not believe that it will arise. It is purely hypothetical. There have been cocky assumptions from Opposition Members that there will be a Labour Government next year. It is all good knockabout stuff. One would not expect, however, any Minister to try to answer hypothetical questions that we believe have no basis in reality.

Dr. Bray: The Foreign Secretary said that he would consider sending a letter, or arranging for a letter to be sent, to each individual in the category. Would that establish that that person was in the category and, if the circumstances arose, that he would then be guaranteed a place?

Mr. Hanley: I heard my right hon. and learned Friend say, and I believe that the record will bear me out, that if anyone wrote to him asking about the Government's policies, he would reply setting them out clearly. That does not mean that an individual would automatically pass through any administrative tests that might be relevant merely by writing a letter and getting a reply. It would not mean that they had been checked or found to qualify. If anyone wishes to write to us to ask about the Government's commitments, we shall reply willingly so that the Prime Minister's promises can be seen for what they are—open and generous ones.

Mr. Rowlands: Let me put something to the Minister that is not hypothetical but real. The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, on which the Government have a majority, was unanimous in its recommendation. I therefore do not understand how the Government can be stiff-necked about something on which there is broad consensus in the House for a move forward. I ask the Minister again to convey to his ministerial colleagues that the Government would have tremendous support if they brought forward the relevant Bill.

Mr. Hanley: Britain recognises its obligations to the Hong Kong people on immigration and nationality issues. We recognise, too, that reassurance is of huge importance to the millions of Hong Kong people. That is why we have promised visa-free access to Britain for more than 5 million holders of the new Hong Kong Special Administrative Region passport. That is why we have given the non-Chinese ethnic minorities the absolute guarantee of admission to the United Kingdom if ever they come under pressure to leave Hong Kong. That is why Parliament granted British citizenship to 50,000 Hong Kong people and their dependants. That is why we are working so hard to reach an early agreement with China on the detailed implementation of the provisions in the Basic Law on right of abode. There is nothing in that record of achievement of which the Government need be ashamed, and much in which we would take quiet pride.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) referred to granting British citizenship to all 3.5 million British dependent territories citizens. I believe that he was limiting that offer to those citizens in Hong Kong, although I am not sure, because he could have meant a wider category given what he said. That issue was settled by Parliament in 1990 after extensive debate and I do not believe that it is right to reopen that debate now.

We believe that the decision to grant citizenship to 50,000 heads of households and their dependants was the right response. It has helped, as we hoped that it would, to encourage key people to remain in Hong Kong to ensure Hong Kong's continuing success and stability up to and beyond the handover. I do not believe that there is agreement between those on the Labour and Liberal Democrat Front Benches about granting citizenship to the 3.5 million British dependent territories citizens, because I certainly did not hear the hon. Member for Leeds, Central advocate what the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber said. I recognise what the hon. Member for Leeds, Central said about the non-Chinese ethnic minorities, but he did not advocate that the granting of British citizenship and right of abode should be spread further.

Sir Russell Johnston: First of all, I confirm that I was talking about 3.5 million people. Secondly, the one thing that we could have done to give absolute confidence and assurance to the people of Hong Kong would have been to grant those 3.5 million people citizenship. Simply because the decision was made in 1990 does not mean that it was the right one, nor that the Government should not reconsider it.

Mr. Hanley: It was the decision made by the House at that time.

The concept of representative government was also strongly debated today.

Mr. Wareing: In 1982, this country devoted enormous sums, rightly or wrongly, to defending about 1,500 people in the Falkland Islands, so it is rather astonishing that today the Government refuse to stand by a large number of people in Hong Kong who have been very loyal to Britain and to the British Crown for many years and who are in danger. The Minister referred to the events of 1990, but six years later the Chinese regime has not changed its spots—a dissident was recently gaoled for 11 years. Although my Front-Bench team has not suggested it, I have sympathy with views expressed by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston). The Government should consider the matter earnestly before the handover on 1 July.

Mr. Hanley: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman, whom I know well and respect, has such a low opinion of Hong Kong's prospects. I believe that it has a bright future and the Government are doing everything they can to ensure that its economy remains healthy and that it continues to be a flourishing society in which to live and work. I do not share the hon. Gentleman's doom and gloom.

The issue of representative government occupied a large part of hon. Members' speeches tonight. I relay to the House the apologies of my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, who had to attend another engagement. Many right hon. and hon. Members focused on our efforts to develop representative government in Hong Kong. Mr. Simon Jenkins pointed out in a characteristically perceptive piece in *The Times* yesterday that it is the centrepiece of the legacy that we shall leave to Hong Kong. Our aim has always been to establish electoral arrangements that are open, fair and, most importantly, acceptable to the Hong Kong people.

We were determined to achieve that structure within the clear parameters set down in the joint declaration and in the Basic Law. We proceeded on that basis to ensure that arrangements for the 1995 elections were wholly consistent with China's prescription for the first legislature of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. That is what we promised, and LegCo agreed in passing our electoral proposals in the spring and summer of 1994.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary suggested, there is no legal or political justification for China to dismantle the legislature chosen on the basis of arrangements that are clearly consistent with all previous agreements on the subject between Britain and China. We devoted most of 1993—through 17 rounds of talks and many hours of patient negotiation—to reaching an agreement with China about the package. It became clear then that China was not prepared to agree to electoral arrangements that we could honestly commend to the House and to the people of Hong Kong.

Regrettably, the alternative to proceeding without Chinese agreement but with the support of the Hong Kong people and their elected representatives was to connive in a flawed legislature. If China proceeds with its plans for a provisional legislature, it will prove both unnecessary and undesirable. However, they are only plans and there is still time for China to consider carefully the consequences of fully implementing those plans.

Our consciences can be clear, as we shall close the last great chapter of Britain's imperial history by leaving in place decent and fair electoral arrangements. We shall have established the habit of representative government, encouraged the growth of accountable government and put in place a benchmark by which our successors will be measured. We can take pride in our legacy to the people of Hong Kong in the field of representative government.

Mr. Tony Banks: The right hon. Gentleman said that an appointed legislature would be unnecessary and undesirable, but would it be unlawful under the terms of the joint declaration?

Mr. Hanley: We have said time and again to the Chinese at the highest levels that we oppose the establishment of a provisional legislature, and that Members of LegCo elected last year should be allowed to serve their natural four-year term.

Mr. Fatchett *rose—*

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend said that during his meeting with the Chinese Foreign Minister, Qian Qichen, on 26 September. The Prime Minister pressed the Chinese again during a meeting with Vice Premier Li Lanqing on 4 November, as I did the following day. China must show that Hong Kong will be run by Hong Kong people, and that "one country—two systems" can become a reality.

The PL is more than a legal debating point. It raises fundamental questions about China's willingness to follow our principle and its own principle of Hong Kong people running Hong Kong. People have asked whether we would co-operate with a provisional legislature. At present it is hypothetical. We are working hard to try to persuade Chinese officials not to proceed with something damaging to Hong Kong's interests. We do not believe that it is helpful to speculate on what steps may or may not be taken.

Neither the joint declaration nor the Basic Law makes mention of a provisional legislature. The establishment of a provisional legislature would seriously call into question China's commitment to its obligations under the joint declaration, as I said, and it is for China to explain how any such arrangement would be compatible with the joint declaration and the Basic Law. We shall continue to make our views plain to the Chinese whenever we have the opportunity. My right hon. and learned Friend said earlier that much will depend on what the provisional legislature purports to do and when.

In the debate tonight no one else on either side has said what he would do. We do not believe that it is desirable to say what we would do in advance. We have not done so and our position is that we are keeping our defences to ourselves at this stage. We are expending every effort not in threatening, but in trying to persuade the Chinese not to go down that route.

Mr. Fatchett: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way again. I put to him once more the question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks). In replying to my hon. Friend, the Minister said that he thought that establishing the provisional legislature would be wrong and mistaken. The question

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was whether it would be illegal. Is he prepared to answer that question? Surely the Government have a view on the matter.

Mr. Hanley: I am not prepared to answer the hon. Gentleman directly on that point. As I said, the PL is not consistent with the Basic Law or the joint declaration. It is for the Chinese to say how they think it is. We shall act when the time is right. We hope that that time will not occur.

The hon. Member for Warley, East and the right hon. Member for Livingston mentioned an exchange of letters in 1990. I will address that point. The hon. Member for Warley, East insisted, as have Chinese officials—but then I would expect the hon. Gentleman to insist as Chinese officials have insisted—that the 1990 exchange of letters added up to an agreement between Britain and China about political developments in Hong Kong.

To set the record straight, we released the texts of the relevant messages, and they show that there was no agreement or understanding between us on the electoral arrangements for 1995 in Hong Kong. At the end of the exchange of messages, the question of electoral arrangements in Hong Kong up to 1997 remained open. Several eminent, independent lawyers confirmed to the Foreign Affairs Committee in 1993 that the seven letters did not constitute an agreement on the 1995 LegCo elections. The arrangements for the 1995 LegCo elections were entirely consistent with the joint declaration and with China's prescription for the first legislature of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, as I said earlier.

Mr. Faulds *rose—*

Mr. Hanley: I shall just finish the point. As the Governor has said many times in public, including to the Foreign Affairs Committee, his advisers and those who helped him draw up the electoral proposals were fully aware of those exchanges. The Governor saw and was aware of the details of the exchanges before his visit to Peking in October 1992 and before the start of negotiations with China on the electoral arrangements.

Mr. Faulds: The right hon. Gentleman should know by now my personal parliamentary character. I do not take instructions from even my party, and I certainly do not take instructions from any Chinese authorities.

I have followed these proceedings with extreme assiduity and have come to the conclusion that it was our fault that the arrangements broke down—through Patten's misjudgment and probably poor advice from certain sections not very far away—and we have damaged the prospects of a peaceful transition for Hong Kong because we wrecked the through-train arrangement. The question of the validity of the seven letters is entirely a matter of opinion.

Mr. Hanley: In no way did I want to insinuate that the hon. Gentleman had taken instructions; it is merely that his words are totally consistent with those of Chinese officials on almost every occasion on this subject, and particularly as far as the Governor is concerned.

On the subject of press freedom—

Mr. Fatchett: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hanley: We are running out of time, but if the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene again, may it be the last.

Mr. Fatchett: I apologise for intervening once again, but it is an important point. My right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) and, indeed, my hon. Friends who spoke earlier, were not trying to apportion blame. The issue that was being raised was what the Government's contingency plans would be if anything went wrong with the Patten through train. That is the situation that we now face. What worries me, in the context of the debate, is that the Minister seems to be working on the tactic that if he talks for longer, events will not catch up with us. They will.

Mr. Hanley: I wish that I could talk for longer, but the hon. Gentleman keeps interrupting me. As far as I am concerned, what I have said I have said, clearly and honestly.

I should like to move on to press freedoms if I may, as I believe that we have dealt with the previous issue fully.

The free exchange of knowledge, the free exchange of ideas, is at the heart of Hong Kong's success. Without the freedom to have opinions and to express them, Hong Kong would not just be a less free, less contented and more repressed society. It would also be a less successful economy. For a society whose prosperity depends on knowledge-based industries, on providing financial and other services into China and across the whole Asian region, the guarantee of free expression is a vital component of economic success. These freedoms are guaranteed unambiguously in both the joint declaration and the Basic Law: freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association and of movement. Those freedoms can properly be constrained only by law, and by law duly deliberated on and enacted by the Hong Kong people's elected representatives.

The hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), to whom I can refer because he intervened earlier, gave a very different impression on television last night. I can assure the House that only the law can constrain press freedoms. It is the more disturbing, therefore, that Chinese officials have suggested publicly that those freedoms may be constrained, and not necessarily by law. They have, for example, drawn an extraordinary distinction between freedom to report and freedom to advocate. They have suggested that, in post-handover Hong Kong, it will not be permissible to criticise Chinese leaders or to commemorate those who died in Tiananmen.

The joint declaration and the Basic Law could not be more clear. Those freedoms will be protected by law in the Hong Kong SAR and it will be for Hong Kong's independent judiciary, not Chinese officials, to interpret the law of the Hong Kong SAR Government. We recently took this up with the Chinese leadership at high level, and I urge Chinese leaders again now to give Hong Kong the reassurance that it needs and deserves on this point. I urge them to be reassured that they have nothing to lose, that they have much to gain, from preserving a free and prosperous Hong Kong.

The joint declaration and the Basic Law provide that Hong Kong residents shall have freedom of association, of assembly, of procession and of demonstration. We were disturbed by recent remarks by the Chinese Foreign Minister that seemed to contradict those guarantees. My right hon. and learned Friend took this up in a message to the Chinese leadership, and the Chinese have since said that Hong Kong people will have full freedom of expression provided that they act within the laws of the Hong Kong SAR, but it is still important for the Chinese to continue to provide assurance on this vital issue, and I urge them, with the full support of the House, to do so rapidly and unequivocally.

China has given an absolute and unambiguous guarantee to protect human rights in Hong Kong after the handover. That guarantee is enshrined in more than one provision of the joint declaration, which is—as hon. Members from both sides of the House have already said—a binding international treaty registered at the United Nations. China has, for example, promised that Hong Kong people's rights and freedoms will be ensured by law. It has further promised that the provisions of the international covenant on civil and political rights and the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights, as applied to Hong Kong, shall remain in force. Both covenants include a requirement to report to the UN treaty monitoring bodies. We continue to urge China to accede to the covenants and to ensure that reports on the Hong Kong SAR continue to be submitted after 30 June 1997.

There will be desperate consequences if China continues to undermine human rights safeguards in the Hong Kong SAR, and not only for the people of Hong Kong, whose rights and freedoms will have been compromised. China would have to justify such action not only to the co-signatory of the joint declaration but to the world community.

In March, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the people of Hong Kong that all Hong Kong's friends and partners, in both hemispheres and all five continents, would be watching to see that the joint declaration was honoured up to and beyond the handover. He promised, too, that if there were a breach of the joint declaration, Britain would mobilise the international community and pursue every legal and other avenue open to us. No one should be under any illusion that ignoring the promises in the joint declaration would be a cost-free option.

The protection of human rights in China, including the situation in Tibet, remains a subject of deep concern to the Government. We regularly express our concern to Chinese leaders—most recently, as I said, during the visit of the Chinese Vice Premier, Li Lanqing. We have also taken vigorous action with our partners in the European Union to promote respect for human rights in China. There is a long way to go. But there is also some evidence that international pressure is making an impact on Chinese thinking—for example, through recent legal reforms.

The recent sentencing of Mr. Wang Dan has highlighted the serious problem. We have urged the Chinese authorities to show clemency and to allow Mr. Wang's early release. I mentioned the case with Vice Premier Li, and also mentioned our wider concerns about restrictions on freedom of expression.

As the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) mentioned, the Legislative Council enacted Hong Kong's Bill of Rights ordinance in 1991. It enshrines in local law the provisions of the international covenant on civil and political rights and is entirely consistent with the joint declaration and the Basic Law. The joint declaration and the Basic Law promise, of course, that the provisions of the covenant, as applied to Hong Kong, will remain in force. Therefore, there can be no question of conflict with the joint declaration or the Basic Law.

We have, therefore, expressed serious concern about a 1995 proposal—from a now-defunct Chinese advisory body, the preliminary working committee—that the Bill of Rights ordinance should be watered down, and that consequential changes to the six other ordinances should be repealed. We have urged China to leave that for the future Government of the SAR, and there have been encouraging signs that China may be willing to respond to the suggestion.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary mentioned progress on Vietnamese migrants. There has been much progress. Our firm objective remains what it has always been: to complete, before July 1997, the repatriation to Vietnam of all those found to be economic migrants; and, with the help of Hong Kong's partners around the world, to find homes for those identified as genuine refugees. We cannot guarantee that we shall achieve complete success, but as my right hon. and learned Friend made clear, we are doing all that we can to reach that goal. Much still has to be done, but a very great deal has been achieved, especially in the past few months.

Following my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's meeting with his Vietnamese counterpart in Bangkok in March, I visited Vietnam in April. The Prime Minister wrote again a few months later, after substantial progress, and the Foreign Secretary visited Vietnam a couple of weeks ago. The need to solve the outstanding problems is therefore at the top of the agenda during those visits and in our discussions with Vietnamese Ministers.

So far this year, 11,000 Vietnamese migrants have returned from Hong Kong to Vietnam and the rate is rising steadily. Last month alone, 1,800 went home. This month, we hope that the total will be more than 2,000. The Vietnamese Government have pledged full co-operation, for which I pay tribute to them. We have already made great strides forward on, for example, logistics. For the first time, migrants from southern Vietnam will return direct by air to Ho Chi Minh city. On the other difficult cases, most notably the so-called pending cases, the Vietnamese Government are, as a result of our exchanges with them, exploring various ideas for solving the remaining problems.

There are grounds for optimism. It may be cautious optimism, but we are optimistic. For our part, we shall continue to work urgently on these issues. I am personally more confident now that a timely solution to this long-standing problem may be at last within our grasp.

The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) asked me about monitoring after the handover. I have already answered that query. We shall continue to monitor until 1 January 2000, through the joint liaison group in direct discussion with the Chinese, and for 50 years after 30 June 1997 under legislation. We shall do so through the full range of political and diplomatic contacts and with our friends and partners in the European Union and the United States and across the

[Mr. Hanley]

world. I, too, hope that the House will play its full part in monitoring developments in the SAR as my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford said that the House should. The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney mentioned the excellent work of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. The hon. Member for Leeds, Central endorsed the plan, which shows that we have satisfactory provisions that will enable us to monitor successfully the future of Hong Kong.

I pay tribute to Members of LegCo, especially those who have come here to make their advocacy. I saw them two days ago and had another meeting with Martin Lee. They urged on us many of the steps mentioned in the today's debate. Those people serve not only their electorates but Hong Kong and its interests very well.

I also pay tribute to Anson Chan, to the administration and to Sir David Ford, the commissioner, for their excellent work in keeping the House informed. It is a tribute to Anson Chan, Sir David Ford and the current and previous administration staff that the independent civil service in Hong Kong is now regarded by the Chinese as essential to the future of Hong Kong. The civil service is one of our great establishments.

I also pay a warm tribute to the Governor. He is one of the most intelligent, able and friendly individuals the UK has produced. Hong Kong has been fortunate to have him and Mrs. Patten, who is unstinting in her service to Hong Kong. They have served Hong Kong with great distinction.

In just over 200 days from now the world will witness one of the most extraordinary political transitions in modern history—6.25 million people and 1,000 sq km of territory will pass from British to Chinese sovereignty and Britain will have amply discharged its promise to hand over a stable and prosperous Hong Kong. It will then be for China to show that the promises made to Britain and to the people of Hong Kong in the joint declaration and the Basic Law mean what they say, that Mr. Deng Xiaoping's far-sighted vision of "one country—two systems" is more than that and that the concept of Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong will work in practice as well as in theory. The burden will then be on China.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary affirmed with such force and passion, Britain's deep commitment to and interest in Hong Kong will continue. As this debate has clearly shown, that commitment is shared by Government and Opposition—by all right hon. and hon. Members. We are all determined to work with China for the most successful possible transition for the people of Hong Kong.

I love Hong Kong. The House loves Hong Kong. We shall always love Hong Kong and look after its interests.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Road Transport

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

10 pm

Sir Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate the development of road transport.

Hardly a day goes by or a newspaper is read without there being some comment on the development of road transport, be it on emission control, alternative forms of transport, the effect on jobs, petrol pricing, new technology, road manners, new road schemes, bypasses or one of many other associated matters.

Recently, pupils at King Egbert school in my constituency did a project to contact their Member of Parliament on various topics that they considered important. Many of them concerned transport issues. I also recently received a copy of a document that I have known for many years—the South Yorkshire joint package bid for 1997-98 on transport. If my postbag is typical, many hon. Members must receive letters on the environment and transport. All that forms the background to the debate.

The public are obviously not aware of the positive steps that the Government have taken to protect the environment. The Department of the Environment publication "This Common Inheritance" was the first ever audit of environmental matters. It was first carried out in 1990, and has been updated each year. It is a most welcome document.

Most newspapers cannot contain news about motoring in their news pages or business sections, and have created motoring supplements. Within the general sales patter, those supplements contain snippets of interesting information about aspects of transport. I particularly enjoy—no plug—*The Daily Telegraph*'s Saturday morning section and "Honest John's Agony Column". I can give a free plug to those who have not read it, because it is a good read. This week's column included items on exhaust emission, radio interference systems and braking systems. My local Sheffield paper, *The Star*, has a motoring section called "Drive".

A little piece in *The Star* caught my eye. It was about a major drive by a petrol company, which proposed converting buses from diesel to liquid petroleum gas. In addition, for the past two weeks there has been a bi-fuel car in the car park of the House of Commons—a car that can run on compressed natural gas, but can revert to petrol if required. I understand that it was there to underline the Government's commitment to cutting harmful atmospheric pollutants. Another snippet of information is that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is to use such a car. I trust that they will become readily available, and will be reasonably priced.

Much has been said over the years about cleaner, more efficient fuels. We cannot be far away from producing an economic battery-driven vehicle. I understand that the size and weight of the battery are a stumbling block. No doubt a company somewhere is working to produce a smaller, lighter battery with a longer range. Perhaps the Minister will comment on progress on that in the United Kingdom.

Vauxhall advised me by fax today—a wonderful machine, the fax—that the General Motors electric car, known as the EV1, has gone into production in the

United States. Meanwhile, motor manufacturers are producing more fuel-efficient engines that require less maintenance, produce lower emissions and have fewer things to go wrong. They are to be complimented on their efforts.

We must not forget that the car and steel industries have flourished since privatisation. As the Minister will be well aware, the Government's publications "This Common Inheritance" and "Transport: The Way Forward"—a Department of Transport response to the transport debate—have done much to resolve many of the environmental concerns.

These publications are not as well known as I would have wished. Perhaps some pamphlets could be provided. There is a slim summary version of "This Common Inheritance", which will help constituents to be better informed about the positive steps that have been taken to protect the environment and improve the use of our transport infrastructure.

As a member of the Environment Select Committee, I have taken evidence on the impact of transport on the environment. A report was produced, entitled "Volatile Organic Compounds in 1995".

Centre stage in this debate is the growth in road traffic and the role that the transport of goods by road plays. Indeed, it plays an increasing part in our modern economy. Many people recognise the advantages of road transport; equally, concern is often expressed about its impact on the environment.

Road transport has expanded job opportunities, increased the number of goods in our shops and improved the efficiency and effectiveness of our industry. It has allowed people more mobility and a wider choice of where to live, shop and enjoy their leisure time. But it has also brought congestion, noise and pollution to many towns, it has damaged landscapes, and it has contributed to the threat of climate change.

Some see transport as a major threat to sustainable development. Traffic growth therefore highlights the problem whether the aims of widening choice, improving the effectiveness of the economy and protecting the environment—all central to Government objectives—can be reconciled. The document "Transport: The Way Forward" is not what I would call bedtime reading, but it does make interesting reading. It marshals the current debate and looks to ensure that transport serves the interests of as many people as possible, in ways that help them most.

I want the debate to continue, and action to be taken to bring to the fore some of what I see as the important issues. It would be parochial of me to point out the lack of a decent road link between Sheffield and Manchester, a subject that I have raised on many occasions, but I do realise the restrictions on the route, which would go through a green-belt area. As one who has defended the green belt, I recognise that that is an insurmountable obstacle.

Yet throughout the country, more than 400 road schemes, including 160 major bypasses, have been completed since 1979 by the Government, and since then, £26 billion has been invested in motorways and trunk roads. About 1,300 miles of trunk roads have been built or upgraded, and capital spending on the road network is now 50 per cent. higher than in 1979.

Motor cars have come a long way since I purchased my first one. It was a Ford Anglia—I can even remember the registration number: RWA 512. It had no radio or heater. It had an 8 hp engine—but I thought I had arrived! This was at a time when we used to put fly deflectors on the bonnet and used semaphore indicators. Anti-freeze was not always in the car, and I had to top up the battery.

Today one can purchase Ford's new model, the Ka. It has air conditioning, power steering, a CD player, an automatic braking system and airbags as standard—what a change. I have seen one, but I shall reserve judgment until I test-drive the car.

Even with my rudimentary skills it was possible on my first car to change the plugs, check the points and do basic maintenance. Servicing took place with an army of mechanics. Today, lifting the bonnet of a modern car is like seeing something from Star Trek; and computers—not people—diagnose the car's ills.

The better use of road freight vehicles is an area in which Britain has made impressive advances. One of the main changes made by organisations has been the establishment of fewer but larger distribution centres serving more outlets. Even the quality of the freight vehicles has to be admired. I, like many others, have become something of a Eddie Stobart lorry-spotter. Other vehicles are equally recognisable.

While some freight can be carried by rail, at other times it is more convenient and economic to move it by road. Lorries now produce less spray than they used to and drivers take more pride in their vehicles. My hon. Friend the Minister, a worldly person, will have noticed variations in petrol prices throughout the country. Although the prices are determined by the petrol companies, there must be a very simple reason for the discrepancy. Perhaps my hon. Friend would care to comment on why petrol prices are 3p or 4p a litre cheaper in London than they are in Sheffield.

Advances in technology have also brought about many changes, and have highlighted the size of vehicles and incorporated technology. We now accept airbags, automatic braking systems, routemasters, dashboard computers, immobilisers and anti-theft devices as normal. Sometimes they are extras, but soon they will be built in, and we will wonder how we ever managed without them. As I said, those and other advances are taken for granted.

We must consider not only personal but public transport. Light railways—I used to call them trams—have been advocated as the solution to all the ills of transport, congestion and pollution in inner cities. Little seems to be heard of trolley buses or, indeed, guided buses, which are multi-purpose vehicles. Guided buses are capable of using existing railway tracks for part of the journey, and when they near the city centre, the railway wheels are taken up and normal road wheels are used to progress further. That is quite feasible, but does not appear to be in vogue. Would the Minister comment on that?

There is a need for more park-and-ride facilities in places such as Sheffield, to enable the switch from private to public transport in our cities. That would utilise the best of both worlds. My hon. Friend the Minister will be most pleased to hear that I do not propose to raise the subject of Sheffield and the supertram.

On the basis of moving traffic from road to rail, as my hon. Friend the Minister is aware, I spent some considerable time—I think it was 13 months of my life—

[Sir Irvine Patnick]

as deputy Chairman of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill Select Committee, in which environmental assessment of the route played a key part. On an associated topic, money is being invested in railways. The privatised Midland Main Line, which serves Sheffield, has undertaken to refurbish the rolling stock and provide further improvements. That will also help to move people from road to rail.

When I was a member of the then South Yorkshire county council, urban traffic control was the in thing; in a nutshell, it was a way of allowing only certain vehicles into an area. When sufficient vehicles were there, the rest were prevented from entering. I was never convinced then that that was the way forward, and nor am I now.

Many aspects of transport will not be covered in this debate—ranging from motor cycling, the strategic cycle network, canals and the local rail network to Sheffield airport—as there simply is not time. It would be well worth my hon. Friend the Minister seeing for himself the progress on Sheffield's airport.

It is a tribute to the Minister and his predecessors that this country now has the lowest number of fatalities in road accidents since records began. I was pleased to be involved in the successful application for funding Sheffield's inner ring road, and saw the changes that were possible to move some of the traffic, which was through traffic, away from the city centre. No doubt my hon. Friend and his officials will have the job of analysing the submission by the South Yorkshire authorities to deliver South Yorkshire's transport strategy joint package bid, which I used to know as the TPP—transport policies and programme.

The private finance initiative provides opportunities for private sector investment in roads. Eight road improvement contracts have been awarded under the initiative, through which the private sector designs, builds, finances and operates stretches of road. Three more projects are in the pipeline.

But it is to individuals that we must return, for they play a big part in the development of road transport. Some decisions should not be made by the Government. They can be taken only by individuals who decide what forms of transport they want to use. Car use is important, especially in rural areas, and can be a necessity rather than a luxury. It can be a source of income and employment in rural communities.

Countryside walking is a growing recreation, and some newspapers cover it, including *The Star*, which has articles by John Spencer on circular walks that start from a car park and give a three or four-mile hike or walk back there. That provides a balance between the needs of the countryside and the needs of individuals, and it should be encouraged.

The Government have addressed a contemporary problem. Many groups express opinions, views and conflicting pressures that will be brought to bear to promote their interests. The Government's publications "This Common Inheritance" and "Transport: The Way Forward" anticipate some of the responses.

It is not easy to resolve the needs of transport and its impact on the environment. If it were, it would have been done years ago. There are many documents and many opinions around that are worthy of consideration on such an important subject. It is not possible to dot every i and cross every t on the documents I have mentioned; nor is my list a full one. I trust that the Minister will find my contribution to the debate, within the time constraints, useful, and I look forward to his comments.

10.16 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick) on his choice of topic for debate. Generally, when I appear in the House at this hour, it is to reply to a debate on a narrow constituency interest. That is right and proper, but my hon. Friend has chosen to make a lucid survey of the whole area of transport policy. I doubt whether time will permit me to reply fully to all the areas he mentioned, so perhaps he will permit me to write to him to cover those areas that I do not have time to cover tonight.

My hon. Friend covered the three main areas: transport and the environment and how we provide infrastructure; the way in which new vehicles are being developed with the environment and greater safety in mind; and transport links in and around his constituency in Sheffield.

The relationship between transport and the environment is central to the transport debate, as my hon. Friend made clear. Transport plays a fundamental part in all our lives, both business and private. It brings huge benefits through personal freedom, and helps to increase national wealth.

The corollary is the massive increase we have seen over the years in passenger travel, especially road travel. From the time that my hon. Friend bought his Ford Anglia—my first car was a 1955 Sunbeam Talbot mark III, closely followed by a Riley 1.5 and a Mini-Cooper—road travel has increased, and we have seen an increase of 260 per cent. since the early 1950s.

Our aspirations to travel where we want when we want are now much higher than they were, but with that freedom also comes the responsibility for considering the effect that our choices have on the environment and our fellow citizens, especially at a time when the pressure to lessen the environmental impact of what we do is increasingly intense.

The whole point of the transport debate, which was started by my right hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney) when he was Secretary of State for Transport, was to stimulate the process of getting people involved in thinking about and planning for the country's future transport needs. The main message—as my hon. Friend has echoed this evening—was concern about traffic growth and its impact on congestion and pollution.

Many respondents to the debate expressed increasing opposition to road building and support for more investment in public transport. Equally, some pointed to the importance of an efficient road network, both to industry and to modern life generally.

In the course of my hon. Friend's survey of policy, he mentioned our Green Paper "Transport: The Way Forward", of which there is, incidentally, a summary version. I shall let my hon. Friend have a copy, and if he wants it in bulk to send to the school he mentioned, I dare say that we could deal with that request, too.

The Green Paper assessed the responses that we have received in the transport debate, and sought to map out a means of progressing. It is based on our commitment to

sustainable development. In practical terms, that means finding a balance between three key objectives in transport policy—promoting industrial competitiveness, protecting the environment and preserving freedom of choice.

I believe that the Green Paper represents a significant step towards finding the right balance between those areas, so that each is sustained without having a severely detrimental effect on any other. They are not at first glance obviously complementary areas, but there can be win-win situations. It is in industry's interests, for example, to create a good working environment, both for employees and to attract inward investment. Traffic problems that have an impact on the environment—congestion, for example—also affect business efficiency.

I may return to some of the general themes, but first I shall deal specifically with some of the issues concerning Sheffield and its surrounding area. As my hon. Friend will know, the Government have given substantial support to road schemes, to the value of nearly £80 million, around Sheffield in recent years. Those include a new link to the M1 via Mosborough, major improvements to the outer ring road and to Penistone road, and a start on the northern section of the inner ring road, which my hon. Friend mentioned.

Regeneration of the lower Don valley has, of course, been the main focus of Sheffield development corporation. One of the corporation's largest projects has been the development of the Don valley spine road, which opened in June. That new road has greatly improved access to the Don valley from the motorway network and from the city centre, and has been an essential element in attracting new investment to the city.

I am pleased to say that the South Yorkshire package bid has been accepted for support for the first time in the current year, 1996-97. The four local authorities in the area and the passenger transport authority have done extremely well to bring forward a joint package so quickly. The package has been allocated funds of £5.5 million this year. I believe that the proposals in it deserve support in the longer term, and, in so far as resources allow, my Department intends to provide funds for the package in future settlements.

We want to see further development of the work that has been done so far. We hope to see a radical shift towards traffic restraint, to deliver the switch from private to public transport that the South Yorkshire supertram was designed to bring about.

I am pleased that the message has been taken on board by the south Yorkshire authorities. The programme of measures proposed for 1997-98 includes better integration between trams and buses wherever possible, continued priority for trams, further restraints on car movements on tram routes, and further controls on commuter parking.

My hon. Friend alluded to the difficulty in setting up a motorway link between Manchester and Sheffield. I am glad that he realises the constraints. The A628 over Woodhead pass, however, forms a major transpennine link. There are alternative routes for long-distance traffic both to the north and to the south. But those routes require significant detours for traffic travelling between Sheffield and Manchester, and may not be realistic options.

That means that there is considerable pressure for the A628 to be improved and its capacity increased. The route passes through Longdendale in the Peak district national park, so we have ruled out a dual carriageway. But the peak joint planning board has accepted the need for improvements to the A628, following the conclusions reached in the south Pennine study.

The study concluded that that approach would serve to concentrate cross-peak traffic on to that route, and so improve the opportunities for traffic management elsewhere within the park. My hon. Friend will be interested to know that, early next month, I intend to visit the Peak national park to see some of the transport and traffic issues and problems on the ground. A scheme identification study is being prepared to identify appropriate schemes. The joint planning board will be consulted during the preparation of the study and any subsequent improvement schemes.

The paper represents an agenda for action, starting now, to shape the way in which people actually use transport into the future. It is not intended to be a rigid transport blueprint. What is needed at this time is a flexible approach that can accommodate the different requirements of different sectors of society in different parts of the country.

In the Green Paper, we have identified five main themes, reflecting the changed emphasis in views on transport policy: reducing dependence on the car, improving planning of transport infrastructure, switching the emphasis from roads to public transport, reducing the impacts of road freight, and making better use of existing road and rail infrastructure.

One of the most encouraging results of the transport debate is a growing understanding of how transport policies work. It is now far more widely recognised, for example, that providing more trains or buses may not in itself be sufficient to persuade people to get out of their cars. It is also clear that there are limits to how far people are prepared to have their car use restrained. I prefer a mixture of carrots and sticks. The best carrot is comfortable, reliable and convenient services from the public transport sector.

The Government have established a strategic framework within which transport choices, both private and business, are made. As is clear from the five themes, there is also a need to focus much more sharply on what steps can be taken to reduce car dependence locally. The majority of car journeys are local—less than five miles—and steps can be taken to reduce their number. The national cycling strategy, for example, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport launched in July, demonstrates the roles that cycling can play.

It is clear, as a result of the national debate, that views on transport have shifted substantially. There is a recognition of the need to take far more account of the environmental impacts of transport. There is a wide recognition that simply expanding road provision cannot be a sufficient answer to growing demand. That is why our Green Paper recognises the shift of view, and proposes a way forward that builds on that national debate.

Public transport will undoubtedly grow in importance as people search for realistic alternatives to car use. New developments on the rail and bus networks—as a result of our privatisation and deregulation initiatives—indicate the importance of transport operators' offering the travelling public services that they want to use. Good nodal links are a crucial part of that. My hon. Friend made

[Mr. John Watts]

particular mention of the important role that park and ride can play. Enhancing service quality—and the overall image of what public transport can provide—is a vital element of encouraging a shift in transport usage.

An efficient transport infrastructure remains essential to national well-being, competitiveness and regeneration. The national network of motorways and trunk roads between important centres of population is broadly complete.

Keeping pace with the increasing demand for road space simply by building roads is not a realistic option, financially or environmentally. We must make more efficient use of our existing roads. Our spending therefore increasingly focuses on maintaining and managing the capacity of our existing roads, with selective improvements through new construction, such as providing much-needed bypasses and removing bottlenecks.

So, although the diverse range of techniques for making the best use of existing roads does not eliminate the need for new building, the clear aim is to enable road building to be used more selectively than in the past.

Forecast traffic growth is a central issue. Although the current traffic forecasts remain the Government's best assessment of how traffic is likely to grow in the light of current expectations about economic growth and existing policies, without additional measures, increasing traffic will lead to increasingly severe pressures on congestion and on the environment. That cannot go on indefinitely.

We accept, therefore, that measures are needed that influence traffic and reduce traffic growth. The Government are not so far convinced that national traffic targets would be practicable. There is too great a risk of imposing costs on society that would not be justified by the benefits. But traffic targets can be a very useful tool for dealing with specific local situations and for helping to focus attention on strategies and the measures needed. I am especially pleased, therefore, to see that many authorities, in making their traffic bids, are placing alongside those bids the targets that they hope to achieve by implementing those policies.

My hon. Friend mentioned the importance of light rail and guided buses, which are potential ways to improve public transport in towns and cities. As he knows, the Government have supported major public investment in light rail systems in several cities, including his own. But light rail schemes are extremely expensive, and although the dedicated infrastructure can guarantee journey time advantages over road traffic, it limits the flexibility of operation to cope with changing patterns of development and demand.

The Government have recently supported development of guided busways in Ipswich and Leeds. The greatest potential advantage of the guided bus lies in the scope to give it absolute priority through congested areas.

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 15 November 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BILL PRESENTED

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION (FRAUD)

Mr. Secretary Lilley, supported by Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Howard, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. Secretary Gummer, Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew, Mrs. Secretary Shephard, Mr. Secretary Forsyth, Mr. Secretary Hague, Mr. Alistair Burt and Mr. Oliver Heald, presented a Bill to amend the law relating to social security offences and to make other amendments of the law relating to the administration of social security: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Monday next and to be printed. [Bill 15.]

Rail Privatisation

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

9.35 am

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): It is many months since our last debate on railways. Curiously, the Opposition's interest in rail debates has waned over the past seven months, perhaps because in that time a great deal of progress has been made with privatisation: we have franchised a further seven passenger lines, and all passenger services are now well on the way into the private sector. In the industry as a whole, we have privatised about 70 per cent. of the old British Rail.

Hon. Members will not be surprised that the Opposition have been unusually quiet on the subject of railways since the spring; it is obvious that they have given up the unequal struggle to pretend that their policy of renationalisation is anything other than dangerous and costly.

The Labour party is not even clear about whether that policy still holds: I note that in Wednesday's *The Daily Telegraph* the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) is reported as having stressed that while not seeking to renationalise the railways, Labour would want to extend central regulation. She went on to outline her plan for revitalising the railways: it is to put Jimmy Knapp on the board. The man who has been dedicated to stopping the railways operating is to be put in charge of running them; that brought to my mind the phrase about putting the wrong people in charge of the asylum.

Until this year, the Labour party appeared not to have a policy at all; it merely parroted its unthinking opposition to the privatisation programme. As we know from all other privatisations, once we have proved them to be a success for the customers, the Opposition have had to accept the wisdom of our policy.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): My hon. Friend mentioned the suggestion that Mr. Jimmy Knapp might be put in charge of the railways. Does he think that that could have anything to do with the trade union sponsorship of some of the Opposition transport spokesmen?

Mr. Watts: I am well aware of the close relationship between the transport unions and many Opposition Members, but I leave my hon. Friend to draw his own conclusions.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I am somewhat bemused by the fact that the Minister and his hon. Friends are not aware that the system whereby individual members of the Labour party were sponsored by individual trade unions is no longer in operation.

Mr. Watts: I am well aware that some fuzziness now surrounds the relationship between Labour Members and trade unions, but that is clearly a matter of form over substance; the substance of the relationship, with the trade unions as the paymasters of their mouthpieces, remains unchanged.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is unworthy of the Minister to

[Dr. John Marek]

suggest that any hon. Member is a paid mouthpiece of any organisation. I hope that you will ask the Minister to think carefully about what he said and that on reflection he will withdraw it.

Mr. Watts: I hope that the principles that the hon. Gentleman wishes to apply to his right hon. and hon Friends will be applied to the way in which Opposition Members regard Conservative Members. Opposition Members are never slow to allege sleaze. If some of the relationships between the business community and hon. Members are considered to be sleazy—

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): Get on with the speech.

Mr. Watts: The hon. Gentleman urges me to get on with my speech, but I am replying to the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek). The relationship between the trade unions, as the paymasters, and the Labour party, must at least come under the same scrutiny as any relationship between industry and my party.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): On dubious relations between political parties and business men, will my hon. Friend dissociate himself and his Department from anything that might have happened in respect of the cash for contracts scandal that has engulfed the Liberal Democrats this morning? They invited business men to lunch with council leaders, to try to give them preferential treatment for the award of contracts.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I do not see that that has anything to do with the debate in hand. The hon. Gentleman has made his point and he must now sit down.

Mr. Watts: I am happy to confirm that I have no connection with or interest in the Liberal Democrat party.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): As the Minister has been kind enough to make that definite point, may I have an assurance that at the next general election he will publish a detailed list of all the moneys accruing to the Conservative party from industrial sources, irrespective of nationality or country of origin?

Mr. Watts: That is not a matter for me. As the hon. Lady knows, British registered companies that make political or charitable donations are required to disclose them in their annual report and accounts. I will return to the theme of my speech, as the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) invited me to.

I welcome the hon. Member for Withington to his first rail debate. I hope that we shall have many more, including some in Opposition time. Perhaps he will be able to explain how renationalisation would be paid for, if that is still Labour's policy; there is confusion between him and his colleagues, which he will no doubt clarify.

As Labour's ludicrous plans depend on diverting subsidy from train operators to Railtrack, how would socially necessary but commercially unviable services be maintained? Where would the money come from to invest in infrastructure improvements: higher fares, higher taxes or higher borrowing? I await with bated breath the hon. Gentleman's answers. Or is he is going to pretend that he learned all that he knows about business from his mother as well?

As the Opposition are living in a fantasy land of their own make-believe, let me take the House through the facts of rail privatisation. I say "facts" because we have been bombarded with every sort of scare story by the Opposition and their friends, none of which has any basis in truth.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Before my hon. Friend moves on from the supposed policies of the new Labour party, has he noted how enthusiastically Back-Bench Labour Members have turned up this morning to support their Front-Bench colleagues? Does not that testify to the fact that there is no Labour policy? Does not the fact that there is only one genuine Labour Back Bencher—the other Labour Member sitting on the Back Benches is a Whip—say much about how seriously the Labour party takes the subject?

Mrs. Dunwoody: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I do not know what the difference is between genuine and bogus Back Benchers. Perhaps there are more of the latter to be found on the Conservative Benches than elsewhere. I can see several genuine Labour Back Benchers, all of whom are of 18-carat gold quality. It is a pity that the same quality is not to be found elsewhere in the House.

Mr. Watts: With the honourable exceptions who are here, I suspect that the dearth of Labour Back Benchers arises because they do not want to listen to the good news. Perhaps they will come later to bolster the failing arguments of their Front-Bench colleagues.

Scare story No. 1 was that Labour Members said that they would stop privatisation. They clearly got that wrong, and the hon. Members for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) and for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) have paid the price. We have already sold 70 per cent. of British Rail, bringing in proceeds to the public purse to the tune of £4.5 billion. We have given opportunities to companies to compete and to win new business, revolutionising our railways by bringing in private sector management and enterprise.

We successfully floated Railtrack on the stock exchange on 20 May, generating more than £1.9 billion for the taxpayer. There are now more than 650,000 private investors and 90 per cent. of staff are shareholders. That is a vote of confidence from those who work in the railway industry. We have sold the rolling stock leasing companies. The first 13 franchises are operating successfully in the private sector, and early this week, the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising selected Virgin as the preferred bidder for Cross Country; the franchise is expected to be awarded shortly. The remaining 11 franchises are on course to be awarded this financial year.

We have sold 90 per cent. of the domestic freight and parcels businesses: Red Star, Rail Express Systems Ltd., and the three Trainload Freight companies. The channel tunnel freight service is on course to be privatised around the end of the year. All seven design offices and infrastructure services and track renewal companies have

been sold, together with a myriad of support businesses, such as heavy maintenance, telecommunications, central services and, in On Board Services, even the British Rail sandwich.

Labour said that Railtrack flotation would flop because of fears of a Labour Government. It did not and there will not be one. Indeed, the shares have been rising as we get closer to the election, and they leapt when the hon. Member for Ladywood was sacked. The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) has been promoted to the political graveyard of the Labour Front Bench.

Scare story No. 2 was summed up in the claim of the hon. Member for Ladywood that a privatised service costs taxpayers more for less. So far, we have franchised 13 lines. Under BR, the grant for those lines was £669 million; next year, private operators will get £76 million less. In seven years' time, the subsidy will be under £200 million—£450 million less. As the retiring franchising director explained to the press recently, contracts for franchising the 13 passenger services let so far will save taxpayers £2 billion over seven years. Not only that, but the greatly reduced public subsidy has bought better services.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): On the industry's overall costs to the country, will the Minister clarify that in overall Government funding for the railway industry, the £2.4 billion from the national loan fund that was loaned to British Rail is mostly to be attributed to the cost of channel tunnel rail services rather than domestic services?

Mr. Watts: Not to the extent of £2.4 billion, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not like to fall into the trap of defining worthwhile investment as only that which goes into the historic network and not into developing a railway for the 21st century.

Dr. Marek: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for Back-Bench Conservative Members to talk to the scribblers in the Box behind you on your right?

Madam Deputy Speaker: In general, it is not in order for a Member of Parliament to do so. It is understood practice that parliamentary private secretaries may pass information to a Minister. I cannot at the moment see what is happening behind me.

Dr. Marek: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. With respect, would you please keep an eye to your right? This is not the first but the second time that a Back Bencher has gone to talk to the civil servants in the Box.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have given my ruling, and I do not expect to have to look behind me to see that it is obeyed.

Mr. Jessel: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member to refer to civil servants—who serve the whole of the country and are impartial in their politics—as "scribblers"? That is a most derogatory word aimed at people who cannot answer back, and it was an unworthy utterance by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek).

Madam Deputy Speaker: I doubt whether the word is precisely unparliamentary, but it falls below the standards that I would expect. I have noted a sense of ill humour in the House this morning that does nothing for the quality of debate, and I therefore invite the House to aspire to the higher standards, and not the lower ones.

Mr. Watts: They scribble extremely well, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The reduced public subsidy has bought better services. Scare story No. 3 was that services would be cut, but Thames Trains will provide a 30-minute service from London to Oxford—the very line used by the hon. Member for Oxford, East, which he has refused to welcome for his constituents—instead of a one-hour service. There are five more trains a day and faster journeys on Great Western, and the franchise for the west coast main line offers the prospect of journey times of two hours from London to Manchester. Midland MainLine plans to introduce dramatic increases in service levels—10 more services each weekday to and from Derby, 10 to Nottingham and 22 for Leicester.

Dr. Marek: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Watts: I shall, but it must be for the last time.

Dr. Marek: I am grateful to the Minister—we have plenty of time. [HON. MEMBERS: "You might have plenty of time."] Well, I might not have plenty of time—there might be no trains in operation. Why does the minimum passenger requirement stipulate two trains instead of three on the route between Euston and Holyhead? Four years ago, we had six trains.

Mr. Watts: The hon. Gentleman will know from the pattern of the franchises let so far that the core services provided are guaranteed in the passenger requirement. Let me remind him that the only absolute guarantee for a particular service under British Rail is one train a year. He will know that, in every case, the operators have continued to provide at least the level of service that they inherited and, in virtually every other case, they have put on additional services, or plan to do so.

Apart from improving the service to Oxford, Thames Trains, for example, will provide additional trains to Thatcham, Theale and Newbury and extra off-peak fast services from Paddington to Maidenhead in 1999. Better services will be provided between Reading and Gatwick, and journey times between Reading and Paddington will be improved. I could go through line after line and give examples of the way in which services are being improved, but pressure of time prevents me from doing so.

Scare story No. 4 came when the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate predicted that

"privatisation will lead to an investment drought in the rail industry".

[Mr. Watts]

So how does she explain the new trains that will be provided by London, Tilbury and Southend?

Ms Glenda Jackson: When shall we see them?

Mr. Watts: Within three years, with the first cascade starting within nine months. Some £400 million of replacement rolling stock will be provided on South Eastern, new trains will be provided on the Gatwick Express, additional new trains will be provided by Midland MainLine and Chiltern, and refurbished high-speed trains will be provided by Midland MainLine and Great Western. In the case of Great Western, the first of those trains rolled out within six months of the franchise being let.

Railtrack is committed to spending £8 billion in the next five years—another £8 billion that we do not have to fight the Treasury for, and which will not come from the taxpayer's pocket. That drives another nail into the coffin of Labour's fantasy railway.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Does my hon. Friend agree that we can expect further investment to add to the figures that he has announced because, as privatisation continues, the process of developing the business will be dynamised? Is he aware that, following privatisation, the car industry is receiving such investment? Today, BMW has announced a £400 million investment in a new engine plant in the midlands. Is not that the sort of investment that we can expect in the railways in future?

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend is completely right, and refers to the Hams Hall site in the west midlands, which has been developed as a rail freight and industrial site. I visited the site a few weeks ago, and saw that massive private investment is going there. It will generate more jobs when it is completed than were provided when it was a power station, and it is the most significant industrial development site in the west midlands. Rover BMW's announcement will be well received.

Great North Eastern plans to order two high-speed tilting trains to reduce journey times between Edinburgh and London from four and a half hours to three and a half hours, and it is refurbishing its existing high-speed trains. Railtrack's interim results, released today, show that it has increased its investment level by £100 million, or 25 per cent. In the first six months of this year, it has spent £0.5 billion, compared with £400 million last year, and it is therefore well in line with its guarantee to spend at least £1 billion a year on infrastructure.

Another of our opponents' tricks has been to tell people that fares would rocket under privatisation—that is scare story No. 5. I am pleased to say that the Government have ensured that key fares have been frozen to the retail prices index for three years from January this year, and will then fall below the RPI for the next four years. We can give guarantees to passengers on fares for the first time ever, and those guarantees will run into the 21st century. What have Labour and the Liberal Democrats said about fares? Have they said that they are too high? Have they said that they would lower them? What promises have they given to the passengers? Again, an incriminating silence has come from the Opposition. Thanks to our determination to introduce competition into the railways, passengers are now seeing rail companies vying with airlines to win their custom. That is why East Coast has a £29 return fare from Glasgow to London to compete with Easyjet.

Midland MainLine—stung by criticism that it was always cheaper for four people to travel by car than by rail—introduced "4Sight", a ticket allowing up to four people to travel anywhere on the network for £29. Connex South East and Connex South Central introduced a new discount during the school half-term, allowing unlimited travel on both networks for a five-day period for just £10 for an adult or £5 for a child.

Scare story No. 6 was that quality would suffer as a result of franchising. In the past few months, we have seen a range of commitments that franchisees are making to attract new customers to the railway. Franchisees have the incentives that they need to create a quality railway, and are improving passenger comfort in the drive to get people out of their cars and on to the trains.

Following the launch of its family coaches this summer, Great Western is introducing Business First, a ticket that covers car parking, tickets for the London underground and meal vouchers. Following the success of the "quiet zones" in standard-class coaches—where the use of mobile telephones and personal stereos is discouraged—the idea is being extended to first class. Gatwick Express plans to offer on-board check-in facilities for airline passengers in club class, and is to spend £100,000 per year on staff training with a view to creating a standard of service comparable with that of the airlines, with special attention being paid to the needs of overseas visitors.

Another great myth—scare story No. 7—was that passengers would lose their network benefits as a result of privatisation, and that rail would cease to co-ordinate its operations effectively with other modes. All the key network benefits have been protected as licence conditions, but the new private sector players are improving co-ordination between the railway and its counterparts in the bus and coach industry. Cardiff Railways, for example, is introducing an experimental bus link between Cardiff international airport and Cardiff central station. South West Trains has introduced its dedicated bus feeder services, plus through bus-rail ticketing for most destinations.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Will the Minister give way on Cardiff Railways?

Mr. Watts: I will.

Mr. Jones: The Minister will be interested to know that Cardiff Railways has just introduced a surcharge on travel during the Christmas period, to take maximum advantage of people travelling into Cardiff to shop. Will the Minister condemn such a blatant use of Cardiff Railways' monopoly position?

Mr. Watts: The privatised railway is pricing its products to increase the number of people travelling by rail. That generally means discounting fares off-peak. I have given many examples of that.

Mr. Robathan: Does my hon. Friend recall an incident last year in Devon, far from my constituency, when it was discovered that the route into Plymouth, which was still

in the hands of British Rail, was being over-used by commuter traffic? British Rail decided to double the fare on that route. That soon sorted out the problem, because no one took the train.

Mr. Watts: I recall that incident clearly.

Great Western is developing comprehensive links with local bus operators, and Midland MainLine is providing a coach-bus link from Corby to Kettering to connect with all the trains that stop at Kettering. Thames Trains has appointed a director whose full-time job is to develop through bus-train ticketing arrangements and links with bus operators to every station on its line into Paddington.

Train operators are also dealing with security by installing closed circuit television in car parks and, as in the case of LTS, employing security guards to reduce crime and improve the safety of passengers and train crews.

Privatisation is bringing an enormous benefit to the travelling public. By putting companies into the private sector, we have reduced the ability of the unions to bring the entire network to a shuddering halt. Of course, the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate has plans to reverse that, by putting the same people in charge of running the railways. Regrettably, strikes were called earlier this year by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers and the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, but those strikes were short-lived because the companies reached settlements quite quickly with their employees. It was often the case that only the national organisation of the RMT stood in the way of agreements that the RMT locally had made with local management.

Conservative Members have condemned such strikes, but from the Opposition we hear nothing but a deafening and sponsored silence. They cannot speak up for passengers; they are not the party of the consumer, just as they can never be the party of business. They are always the strikers' friend and the passengers' enemy.

So far, I have spoken about the passenger railway. Scare story No. 8 was that privatisation would mark the death knell of rail freight. The facts tell a different story. The House will know that in our transport Green Paper we stated that one of our key aims was to reduce the impact of road freight. Clearly, one way of doing that is to increase the amount of freight carried by rail. I can safely say that such a policy will command universal support in the House.

As hon. Members know, in September I announced important changes to the grant regime for rail freight. To give further impetus to our policy, we have increased the rate at which grants can be paid to companies that want to put freight on rail, but need some assistance. I have increased the motorway mileage rate fourfold, from 5p a mile to 20p a mile. As a practical example of the impact that that can have, our grant has taken 67,000 lorry journeys a year off the roads between Immingham docks and Sheffield.

Mr. Winston Churchill (Davyhulme): Is my hon. Friend aware that from the Euro freight railhead at Trafford Park in my Manchester constituency, seven freight trains per night leave for Europe and come back from Europe? That relieves the motorway network of many hundreds of container lorries per night.

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend is right. That is not just the experience of the terminal in his constituency. There is tremendous private sector investment in new terminals, such as the one at Daventry and Hams Hall, which was mentioned earlier.

There is no doubt that privatising the freight side of BR brings more companies a commercial opportunity to send their supplies and products by rail. English, Welsh and Scottish Railways is so convinced of the market potential that it has already ordered 250 new locomotives. It has recently won new business by being able to organise a freight service in three days, instead of the three weeks that that would have taken under the old arrangements.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Watts: Not again; I am sorry.

I am confident that with private sector enthusiasm and the significant opportunities offered by the channel tunnel, there will be a revival of rail freight.

EWS is investing in its wagon fleet—120 surplus wagons are being converted into box wagons for use in coal services, 22 flat wagons are being converted to carry steel coil and 50 redundant vans will be refurbished to become modern curtain-sided vehicles to promote new business. EWS has announced an expansion of its Enterprise—wagonload—service. New services will link the ports of Goole, Immingham and Avonmouth with the Enterprise network, starting in January.

EWS is moving pipes for the North sea gas and oil fields, between Hartlepool and Georgemas junction. Those trains are believed to be the largest ever to operate in the Scottish highlands. The company has brought back coal trains to Castle Cement's Padeswood works in north Wales, and hauled pipes from Stanton plc's Ilkeston works to Plymouth. Coal trains have gone back into Falmouth docks. There are many other examples of the way in which the business is expanding.

Freightliner has recorded a record number of container movements in Felixstowe and Manchester. It also has plans to refurbish its locomotive and wagon fleet.

Our policy is bearing fruit. Passengers are increasingly experiencing the benefits of that policy in better services, capped fares and new investment. Taxpayers are also being helped, with more than £2 billion-worth of savings of subsidy over the next seven years. Investment is increasing, not decreasing.

While our opponents look back to nationalisation—a state monolith belonging to the dark ages—we look forward to the next millennium, when our national network will be worthy of national pride.

The Government recognised long ago the case for privatising the commanding heights of the economy. We have had the vision, courage and strength of purpose to apply the tried and tested privatisation formula to the railways. Now, after four years of scare stories, the fightback is well and truly under way. The franchising programme is now churning out service improvements at such a speed and to such an extent that the media are finding it difficult to keep up.

[Mr. Watts]

Rail user groups are increasingly coming to recognise the benefits that privatisation has brought. A shift in public attitudes is under way. The future of the railway in the UK is secure. The case for privatisation is so overwhelming that in 10 years the radicalism of today's policies will look like nothing more than common sense. By putting the railways into the private sector, we are powering them into the 21st century.

10.7 am

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): The Minister has presented a glorious picture of the success of rail privatisation and has built on the claims of the Secretary of State at the Tory party conference, when he stated that privatisation had ensured that fares were under control, services were improved, there was more investment and lower subsidy, and the future of freight was bright. It is important to test the truth of those claims, and especially to assess whether rail privatisation has been good value for money for taxpayers or whether, instead, they have been almightily ripped off. I do not use the expression lightly.

Let us consider the cost of privatisation and the amount of public subsidy involved. More than £450 million was spent on consultants and other professional advice. I understand that lawyers involved in the process were hired at a staggering rate of £25,000 per day. The National Audit Office recently criticised Opraf for failing to set a budget for advisers' and consultants' fees on which it spent nearly £40 million in taxpayers' money between 1993 and 1996.

The amount of public subsidy has almost doubled since privatisation, from £1 billion the year before privatisation to nearly £2 billion the year after. Before Railtrack's privatisation, a staggering £1,229 million debt was written off. In addition, assets have been massively undervalued. The three train leasing companies were sold for £1.8 billion at the end of 1995, but Ministers have suggested that they are worth as much as £3 billion. A Department of Transport press release from July 1994 states that

"the ROSCOS have assets in the region of £1 billion each."

In August 1996, Stagecoach paid £825 million to take over Porterbrook train leasing company, yet eight months previously, the Government had sold Porterbrook for a mere £527 million.

Mr. Watts: The hon. Gentleman is quite correct, but he should complete the picture. Eight months earlier, Stagecoach bid for the rolling stock operating companies. It underbid because, like everyone else in the market, it did not realise what the companies would be worth once the privatisation programme had proved a great success.

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful for the Minister's intervention, as he confirms our claim that the assets were undervalued and that the taxpayer has lost out because of the sell-off. Despite the Minister's intervention, it is clear that the Government sold assets short to make some quick money. Is that good value for money for the taxpayer?

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Would it not assist the privatisation of assets in this country if the leading Opposition party were to hype the value of those businesses instead of undermining them? The £55 billion that the British taxpayer has invested in British Rail hardly represents value for money. The money that is being spent to move those businesses into the private sector—where they can generate profits and people will realise their true value—might provide an opportunity for the Labour party to call for a windfall tax when they prove successful.

Mr. Bradley: The hon. Gentleman often attends debates on a Friday and he usually makes thoughtful and important contributions. Sadly, his offering today is utterly bogus and adds nothing to the debate.

One of the four directors walked off with £39 million in shares as a result of the Porterbrook deal. The chairman is reported to have received £4 million for shares that he bought for £25,000 only eight months before. In the interim, it is believed that he worked for Porterbrook for only eight days—that is an average of £500,000 each day. It is hard to believe that the directors' contributions had such a dramatic and rapid impact on the company's performance as to warrant those excessive profits. Is that good value for money for the British public?

The Tories claim—as they did today—that rail privatisation will save £2 billion in public subsidies. That estimate is based on the declining rate of public subsidy on the 13 franchises awarded to date and it does not take account of the efficiency savings that British Rail proved it was capable of making. There is much evidence to support that contention. The Government are clearly not comparing like with like.

Furthermore, the Tory claim does not take into account the Government's high liability offer to take back any franchise if a private operator runs into financial problems. A recent study reported in *The Sunday Times* of 27 October revealed that only five of the 13 franchises already in private hands were likely to make a profit by the end of the franchise period. That suggests a potentially high financial liability for the public purse.

Mr. Churchill: Is the hon. Gentleman seriously harking back to the bad old days when politicians and bureaucrats played trains and ran other commercial organisations? Does new Labour believe that the state can operate commercial organisations better than the entrepreneur?

Mr. Bradley: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I shall come to that point later in my speech. If he is not happy with my comments then, I shall gladly give way again.

The Secretary of State's second claim—the Minister reinforced it this morning—concerned more investment. Investment in rolling stock and infrastructure has continued to decline in real terms and in relation to our European and international competitors. There have been no new trains on the track since privatisation. Furthermore, Railtrack is under no legal obligation to invest in the network and the Rail Regulator is not obliged to force it to invest any proportion of the notoriously high track access charges in the network.

One of the worst travesties of privatisation is the lack of an enforceable obligation on Railtrack to invest any proportion of its proceeds from land and property

disposals in infrastructure. Railtrack has an extensive portfolio, including 20,000 miles of line and 2,500 stations located on prime sites in towns and cities, yet it has no obligation to invest proceeds of sales in the privatised companies. As a result, the privatised Railtrack is simply a property speculator, selling its portfolio to boost dividends for shareholders rather than investing in the national rail network.

A press release issued this morning refers to Railtrack's obligations and its relationship with the regulator. It is interesting to note the comments of Robert Horton, the chairman of Railtrack, who states:

"We will continue to give a high priority to maintaining our close relationship with the Rail Regulator".

Railtrack is under no obligation to comply with the Rail Regulator's rulings—it will merely try to continue a close relationship. That is not good enough.

Mr. Watts: Railtrack has no option but to have a close relationship with the regulator because the nature of his functions necessitates close contact. Presumably the hon. Gentleman is aware that the regulator has decided to impose a single-till approach to Railtrack's revenue, whereby any returns from the property side of the business are taken into account when setting the track access charges that the regulator permits Railtrack to levy on the train operating companies. If the regulator is not satisfied that Railtrack is fulfilling its investment obligations, he has the power to reduce the track access charges and remove that stream of revenue.

Mr. Bradley: But does that apply to 100 per cent. of the proceeds or just the 25 per cent. that flows through in that way?

Mr. Watts: The arrangements are fairly complicated. Above a certain level of gain on land transactions, there is also a clawback of the super-profits, but I will happily write to the hon. Gentleman and set out the full position.

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful that the Minister will write to me to clarify that, because it seems clear from his response this morning that it does not apply to all the proceeds, and it reinforces our point that the regulator should have control over 100 per cent. of the proceeds.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Bradley: I give way to my hon. Friend.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Under Railtrack, unlike under British Rail, responsibility for more than 1,000 bridges has been handed to local authorities, many of which will find it extremely difficult to carry out the necessary rebuilding work. The Government do not accept the burden that that places on local authorities.

Mr. Bradley: My hon. Friend makes a very important point about transferring liabilities from Railtrack to ensure that it boosts its profits, to the benefit of shareholders, rather than making essential investment.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman allow me?

Mr. Bradley: No, I must get on with my speech. I have given way to the hon. Gentleman once and he made a less than effective intervention. We should not waste the time of the House any more this morning.

I ask again whether all of this is good value for money for the British taxpayer. Railtrack's excessive charges have prevented some local authorities and major companies from opening new stations and funding new services. For example, in 1992 British Rail put in an estimate of £353,000 to open a new station at Ashchurch in Gloucestershire, yet in 1995 Railtrack wanted more than £1 million to do exactly the same job.

Mr. Robathan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bradley: I shall move—

Mr. Robathan: Oh, go on.

Mr. Bradley: I shall give way once more and then I must make progress.

Mr. Robathan: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should mention British Rail reopening stations, because he may recall that the history of British Rail is one of closure, particularly in the 1960s. I will, if I may, take him to his own patch of Manchester, which I do not know well but which he will know much better than me. Does he remember that, when we were young, it was possible to travel from Didsbury to Chorlton cum Hardy, which I think is in his constituency, and from Warrington to Stockport and Manchester, but British Rail—this marvellous paragon of virtue to which he harks back—closed those lines, so it is not possible to travel there any more? We now have to go on the M56 and through spaghetti junction to the south of his constituency.

Mr. Bradley: I am extremely pleased that the hon. Gentleman mentioned the Didsbury to Chorlton line, because there is a proposal for a light rapid transport link to it from the new Manchester Metrolink, which will be a much better use of that route. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will make representations to Ministers to fund that line, to the benefit of my constituents in Withington.

I shall move quickly to the next claim—

Mr. Robathan: I am not surprised.

Mr. Bradley: I shall move rather more quickly than the investment proposals for the Manchester Metrolink are moving as a result of the Government stalling on backing and underwriting them.

The Secretary of State's next claim was that the future of freight is bright. The Tory record on getting more freight on to rail is quite shameful. Rail accounts for only 6 per cent. of freight traffic in the United Kingdom—down from 11 per cent. in 1978. Railtrack levies notoriously high track access charges for freight, despite recent changes, which does nothing to encourage more freight on to rail. Railtrack charges 30 per cent. of English, Welsh and Scottish revenues in track access charges—twice as much as it costs in America. In some cases, track access charges are up to 60 per cent. of revenues. English, Welsh and Scottish pays Railtrack £120 million a year in track access charges. A National Audit Office report on the freight facilities grant shows that the Department of Transport had given only £32 million of the budgeted £70 million of grant between

[Mr. Bradley]

April 1985 and March 1996. Last year, freight operators were allotted only £4 million out of a total of £40 million budgeted for the grant.

Private freight operators have slammed Railtrack's excessive track access charges and the bureaucratic hurdles that stand in the way of getting more freight on to rail. We heard the Minister say this morning how confident English, Welsh and Scottish is, but its chairman, Ed Burkhardt, whose company accounts for 80 per cent. of UK freight, complained of

"delays and excessive pricing levels"

for allowing freight trains access to railway lines. He continued:

"We have lost customers since we bought the freight business here . . . The major thing that has stood in the way has been Railtrack being very slow to give a quote and then wanting to charge a new high."

Similarly, David Mann, property manager of PowerGen, tried to build a freight terminal, but was almost prevented from doing so by Railtrack's "intransigent" treatment, demanding large sums for a bridge to cross the line.

Mr. Mann was quoted in *The Observer* of 8 September 1996 as saying that such treatment from Railtrack would

"stop future rail terminals being constructed"

and make it "more and more difficult" for projects to get under way.

"People will revert to road,"

he warned.

At a time when the public are crying out for action to alleviate the dreadful congestion on our roads, does this example give any hope that the privatised rail network will help to solve the problem?

The fare structure and through-ticketing arrangements seem at best to be confusing. For example, a number of railcards and discount fares are not protected, so train operators can pull out of national fare schemes. Anglia has pulled out of the Network card and the Supersaver scheme. Other unprotected fares are free travel for under-fives, the forces railcard, cheap day return and Apex tickets for InterCity services. Only between 21 per cent. and 25 per cent. of fares are capped. Do the Government have any view on the way in which such fares are operating, or are they happy to let the confusion in the public's mind continue?

Similar comments can be made on passenger services. All passenger service requirements, which set minimum standards for service, are lower than when British Rail ran them. Again, there are clear examples. The draft west coast main line and north London railway PSR would allow a private operator to axe all inter-city services to Watford junction and Milton Keynes and cut weekday services to Watford on the Northampton line from five trains per hour to three.

I shall ask the Minister specific questions about the west coast main line proposals, because Railtrack's press release today—this must be a misprint, but in the current situation we could believe anything—states:

"In October 1996 Railtrack announced a £150 passenger upgrade investment".

I hope that that is £150 million, or is £150 what Railtrack proposes to invest in the line? More important, will the Minister confirm that the total of £150 million plus the £157 million core investment will ensure that tilting trains can run to their maximum effect throughout the line from London to Scotland and that all necessary upgrades throughout the route will be made?

Will the Minister also confirm that that investment will enable the bridge and other infrastructure work to be undertaken so as to allow piggyback freight operations throughout the length of the line, and onward through to the tunnel? It is essential that the west coast main line, through the midlands to Manchester and onwards through other parts of the north-west to Scotland, is not only modernised but fully and comprehensively upgraded; otherwise, the introduction of tilting trains will not have the desired effect.

Will the proposals for the Birmingham-Northampton line to be linked to the west coast main line include similar enhancements? Unless there is consistency of upgrading of the trains that are to join the west coast main line, tilting trains will not be able to run to maximum effect.

Sally Keeble, the Labour candidate in Northampton, wrote to the Secretary of State regarding the consultation process on the Northampton line. It is clear that bids are being requested before completion of that process. They may be only indicative bids, but if the public are to be able to rely on and have confidence in the consultation process, it is essential that their voices about passenger service requirements on that line are heard.

The Government may claim that confusion about fares, through ticketing and services will be overcome by the introduction of the national train inquiry line. Again, it is difficult to argue that the public are getting value for money. There is mounting evidence of problems with the service. It is clear that the quality of information given at different train inquiry bureaux differs hugely. It is impossible to attribute blame to any location or individual when customers are misinformed.

I shall briefly cite one example of the problems that the public are experiencing. On Sunday 10 November 1996, Mr. and Mrs. Ward were booking to fly home from Stansted airport to Prestwick. They telephoned the national inquiry line for train times from north London to Stansted. At 9.30 am, Mr. Ward made an inquiry—which it is believed was answered in Newcastle—about train times after 12 o'clock from Tottenham Hale to Stansted airport. The answer given was:

"Trains to Stansted not running today due to Engineering works. Trains will start therefore at Seven Sisters, with bus connections from Liverpool Street and Tottenham Hale, and will run half hourly."

At 9.50 am, Mrs. Ward, unbeknown to Mr. Ward, made another inquiry—this time it was answered in London. She asked about train times after 12 o'clock from London Liverpool Street to Stansted airport. The answer given was:

"Trains to Stansted today subject to engineering works, will leave Liverpool Street 10 minutes earlier than usual at 20 and 50 minutes past the hour and will be subject to delay."

At 10.30 am, Mr. Ward made another inquiry, believed to have been answered in Birmingham. He asked for train times from London Liverpool Street and Tottenham Hale to Stansted after 12 o'clock. The answer given was:

"Trains will leave London Liverpool Street on the hour and half hour to Stansted calling at Tottenham Hale at 10 and 40 minutes past the hour."

Mr. Ward further asked what effect engineering work would have on services. The answer was:

"None. There are no engineering works on this line."

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West) *rose—*

Mr. Bradley: The confusion and farce continued. Following discussions, Mr. and Mrs. Ward decided to travel from Liverpool Street and to allow an extra two hours for possible problems. Tottenham Hale was considered risky, as there was no guarantee of a service. The outcome was that trains left Liverpool Street on time, and they arrived at Stansted with an extra two hours to spare. Afterwards, Mr. Ward telephoned the national inquiry line and was assured that there had been engineering works when he was travelling to Stansted on the Sunday, but because of the service he would not have noticed that. The service to the public is in absolute confusion. Is that the service that the Government support?

Mr. Butterfill *rose—*

Mr. Bradley: I shall give way for the last time, because time is getting on.

Mr. Butterfill: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman—he has not previously given way to me, and I have been listening to him intently.

The hon. Gentleman's anecdote was amusing, but is he really suggesting that such incidents never happened when the service was run by British Rail? Does he recollect trying to get through to British Rail inquiries, and how long he had to wait for the telephone to be answered? Is he aware that South West Trains is spending £200,000 this year on improving its answering service? We would have given our eye teeth for that when British Rail ran the service.

Mr. Bradley: The Government claim that the privatised industry provides a better service. I have given an example of the chaos and confusion that is reigning throughout the country in the different operating companies. There is no consistency of treatment from one train operator to another. That is the truth of the matter, and the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) should ask his constituents what is happening in the real world.

The Government may claim that it is only the Labour party that is expressing such concerns—the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West seemed to imply that by what he said. Complaints received by the rail users consultative committee in the west country show that the evidence is stark. In that area, the number of complaints has increased by 40 per cent. to a record 2,371. When those figures are broken down, they show that complaints about train conditions have risen by 124 per cent., about fares and marketing by 92 per cent., overcrowding and bad information by 79 per cent. and punctuality by 66 per cent. Is that good value for money for taxpayers as a result of rail privatisation?

With barely five months to go before the general election, it is important that we look forward, not merely backward, and consider the future of our railways. It is our aim not to go back to the old structures, but to create a new system capable of mobilising high investment and achieving a more intensive use of rail. Our policy is to move by stages away from the fragmented industrial structure that the Government have created towards an integrated system for the benefit of passengers, with stronger protection for the public interest, to ensure the best value for money from public subsidies.

A systematic framework that encourages strategic decisions consistent with wider Government policy on transport must be instituted. To achieve that, we intend to reconstruct British Rail as a fully publicly owned and publicly accountable company holding the public interest in the rail network. That strategic planning body for the railways is essential, because the current fragmentation and multiplicity of players—the network has been split into more than 100 companies—make it difficult, if not impossible, to take a systematic view of future strategy.

Labour will return to the Secretary of State the power to direct the Rail Regulator to use the existing regulatory regime to secure higher investment and a more intensive use of the system. Under a new regulatory framework, the powers of the Rail Regulator over Railtrack will be used to the full to protect the interests of passengers and the taxpayer. For example, the regulator will be asked to ensure that land and property that are needed for the railways are not sold and that a proportion of the proceeds of any sales that do go ahead are invested in the railways.

Mr. Churchill: Is the hon. Gentleman seriously telling the House and the nation that if by mischance Labour was elected to govern, it would put the clock back to the state of affairs that prevailed before, when politicians were in the driving seat? It was absolutely disastrous for British Rail and all the other nationalised industries to be run politically and bureaucratically.

Mr. Bradley: I have made it quite clear that we shall not move back to the old structures. We shall set up a strategic body to deal with the fragmentation of the rail network to ensure that it works in the public interest, that subsidy is transparent and that the taxpayer gets value for money.

Labour's clear objectives are a modern, integrated rail network with easy access for all to effective ticketing and travel information. We shall facilitate rail interchanges for passengers and freight and between rail and other forms of transport. We shall direct more of Railtrack's proceeds to investment in the network; reform track access charges to encourage more passenger and freight traffic; mobilise more investment in the network; and look at completing regional high-speed links to the channel tunnel and beyond. Essentially, we shall ensure high standards of safety through an independent body. That is what the public want from our railways and they will support it. We shall give that and it will provide real value for money for our people.

10.41 am

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): I shall start by recording my enormously happy experience over four and a half years as a Transport Minister. Specifically, I should

[Mr. Steve Norris]

like to put on record my enormous admiration for the three Secretaries of State for Transport with whom I had the pleasure of serving during that time. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) was the architect of the Railways Act 1993 and he, with my right hon. Friend who is now the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and me, sat down with practically a blank sheet of paper. I recall the permanent secretary saying to us immediately after the 1992 general election, "I am afraid that we did not do a lot of work on this because quite honestly we did not think that you would win." My advice to my good friend Sir Patrick Brown is that perhaps this time it might be as well to keep all the files current.

I also pay a warm tribute to my right hon. Friend the Minister without Portfolio, who brought a tremendously incisive political mind to bear on the problems of transportation. He deserves great credit for initiating the debate on transport. It was long overdue and it has moved us on by a generation in terms of thinking about how to develop our transport infrastructure. I am sorry that my right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State for Transport cannot be with us as I should have liked him to hear my enormous admiration for his work.

Mr. Bradley: What a crawler.

Mr. Norris: Ex-Ministers have the great advantage of not needing to crawl. And when they intend to leave these hallowed portals when the Prime Minister calls the general election they have even less cause to make such remarks—unless they are sincerely meant, as I assure the House that they are. I have admired the present Secretary of State for Transport for many years, since his wonderful principled opposition to the ill-fated community charge. That opposition was conducted with great decorum and amazing effectiveness, and he is now doing sterling work in his present Department. The only issue on which my right hon. Friend and I ever disagreed was on the compulsory fitting of bicycle bells. I leave the House to determine which of us wanted them to be fitted compulsorily.

I welcome the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) to his new post. I have always thought of him as a rather decent chap and for the life of me I cannot think what he must have done to deserve to be given the ultimate Labour poisoned chalice—responsibility for a policy that is in tatters and is without a shred of intellectual or moral integrity. I can only suggest that it must be due to something in the Stalinist, Beria-like regime that floats around the Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) and Mr. Alastair Campbell, so that in some secret way the hon. Gentleman and probably members of his family are destined for some distant gulag. I had thought that he deserved rather better.

We all know why the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) is in the transport team. The problem with a double Oscar winner who sounds like Stalin's granny is what on earth to do with her. She speaks charmingly and is charming, but she is decades out in terms of new Labour and that must present the Leader of the Opposition with an enormous challenge. No doubt she will rise to it with her usual good grace and spirit. I look forward to the time after the next election when she becomes Opposition spokesman on national heritage or is given some other opportunity that will enable her to display her talents to the full.

Ms Glenda Jackson: I am surprised to discover that the hon. Gentleman is old enough to have heard any of the utterances of Stalin's granny, and even more surprised to discover that he is so fluent in Russian that he understood what she said.

Mr. Norris: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for pointing out that I am not old enough to have heard Stalin's granny verbatim. However, I have a vivid picture of what her morning breakfast lectures must have been like and I suspect that the hon. Lady must have taken them in as mother's milk. However, it is ungentlemanly to refer to an hon. Lady's age and I shall not do so.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Get on with it.

Mr. Norris: The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) has taken her accustomed ill-humoured corner in which to spread herself over a number of seats. One of the characteristics of the debate so far has been the extent to which body language is so obviously different. Opposition Members show that rictus of mild terror which suffuses any party which knows that it is about to lose the argument. There is also ill humour, as demonstrated by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek): I used to think that he chose to sit on his own, but I now know that Opposition Members, recognising the trait of the ancient mariner, have taken their own decisions. Perhaps that also accounts for the splendid isolation of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich.

The hon. Member for Withington started well enough with a paeon of praise for the Government's policy. Sadly, his speech degenerated into an utterly laughable anecdote about unfortunate people who were badly served by British Rail's information system. Let us not pretend for a moment that that is either funny or acceptable, because it is not. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) was absolutely right to say that that kind of nonsense occurred every year when the railways were nationalised. It happens now, albeit rather less, and the train operating companies are making a genuine effort to try to improve the service. I fear that if we were to have a similar debate in 10 years' time we would probably be able to surf the Internet to find an example of a customer who had been badly served and given contradictory information. In a system as complex as the rail system by its nature must be, we should accept that such incidents occur—although we should never be complacent.

It is not good enough to rest opposition to the changes that the Government have made on an isolated anecdote. Nor is it acceptable—to my mind, this point is much more serious—to treat the privatisation of railways with the same mixture of ignorance and the politics of envy which constituted much of the speech by the hon. Member for Withington. He said a lot about the profits of Porterbrook's original directors. No doubt those profits are spectacular, and I wish the directors well. As I believe that my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads said in an intervention, however, those profits were made

largely because most people in the marketplace listened to Labour and its constant attempts to denigrate the privatisation of the industry. Those who had chosen to invest against Labour's advice were thus able to profit from the reward.

Mr. Butterfill: Might the profits also be due to the fact that at the time of privatisation the Labour party was committed to renationalisation of all those assets?

Mr. Norris: I will come to that point because the central point of our debate today is whether privatisation has worked and will work, or whether it has been the disastrous failure that the Opposition allege. It is important to note that the Opposition's Front-Bench spokesman devoted so much of his speech to the fact that one or two people in the railway industry have already done rather well. It is that politics of envy which runs through the whole of Labour policy and means that the Opposition are never even willing to look at the underlying structural improvements that the industry has undergone. For my part, I am not concerned whether the directors of Porterbrook or any of other leasing or train operating company do well or badly: I am concerned about how well the passengers who want to use the rail services are treated. It is patently obvious, as I shall go on to demonstrate in a moment, that the passengers are now infinitely better treated and have better prospects of improved services than was ever the case with the nationalised railway.

Dr. Marek: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Norris: For auld lang syne, I will give way.

Dr. Marek: The point surely is that the £300 million profits went to the private sector because the public sector—the Government—did not realise or did not choose to realise the true value of the assets that were sold under the bidding contract. We feel not envy but disappointment that £300 million of public money was forgone through the Government's ineptitude in not realising or in choosing not to realise the true value of the assets. The issue is not the money, but the fact that it should have been in public coffers and it is now in private coffers.

Mr. Norris: The invariable response of the Labour party, when a privatisation proves to be not only successful but rewarding, is to complain that any of the reward that is gained once the industry has been privatised is somehow an amount due to the public purse. What it overlooks, of course, is that one of the beneficial consequences of privatisation has been the receipt of £4.4 billion of capital value, which the taxpayer has now had back from an industry that in nationalised hands—the hands of the state—offered no prospect whatever of any return to the taxpayer at any point in the future. I am disappointed in the hon. Member for Wrexham, because the last position that any credible interlocutor should adopt in this debate is to complain that the second-generation profits in previously nationalised industries are somehow a loss to the taxpayer. It is clear that the taxpayer has benefited hugely from privatisation.

The important point is how, in the past two or three years, the whole debate on railways has swung around by 180 degrees. I remember sitting where my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London is sitting now and listening to the three stages of the Labour debate. First, Labour said privatisation could not happen. It said that the railways were the one area of privatisation that even Lady Thatcher dared not attempt. It was too complex—

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Unsaleable.

Mr. Norris: As my hon. Friend observes, the railways were alleged to be unsaleable. Some asked how we could possibly have one operator operating an inter-city train, another running a regional railway train, a third running a freight train and a fourth in charge of the signalling. They asked how we could possibly make that work in the private sector, and they were perhaps rather alarmed to discover that that was precisely how the railways had operated for the previous 20 years. First, Labour said that privatisation could not happen. Then we went through an extraordinary stage when Labour said that it would not happen. A party that purported to be a serious party of government—

Mr. Jenkin: New Labour.

Mr. Norris: As my hon. Friend says, it is now new Labour and we all know the jokes, which are now so old and tired that they are hardly worth repeating. [HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] No, I have no wish to intrude on private grief and the House does not have the time to listen to my rantings on that subject. I shall just make one point crystal clear: until the successful privatisation of Railtrack and the enormous interest in the train operating companies proved the point beyond all doubt, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott)—the unlikely, dare I say it, deputy leader of the new Labour party—asserted that the Labour party did not need to have a policy on the renationalisation of the railways, because privatisation would not happen.

The poisoned chalice was then handed to the poor, ill-fated hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short), who labours under the appalling burden of honesty that so afflicts Opposition Members—

Mr. Bradley: It does not seem to bother your lot.

Mr. Norris: It is an extraordinary burden that we all bear with fortitude, but some of us have learnt over the years to wear a cynical veneer that protects us from its worst excesses. Sadly, the hon. Member for Ladywood has yet to learn that lesson. She indulged in a critique of rail privatisation which implied that every private sector involvement in the railway was just an opportunity for a private sector company to rip off profits from passengers. She had not the slightest regard for the reality of the enormous improvement in passenger service that the new railway envisages.

If the first stage of Labour's argument was that privatisation could not happen and the second that it would not happen, the third stage was that it should not happen. The argument is that privatisation has simply resulted in profits for leasing companies and that the issue is about the private sector, as ever, filling its coffers at the expense of the hard-pressed taxpayer. The reality is, of course, that transport is—perhaps above all—the field of enterprise which proves beyond doubt that privatisation works. One has only to look at the record of British

[Mr. Norris]

Airways, which is still the only major flag airline of any European state to have been privatised. Other states said that it could not be done, but we did it so long ago that the results are beyond argument. International airlines operate not within the cosy confines of one nation's boundaries, but in the toughest market of the lot—the world market. What has happened to British Airways? Has it collapsed, as the Labour party, including the Labour Chief Whip, asserted that it would? No. It has gone from strength to strength and is now arguably the most powerful airline in the world.

The British Airports Authority has converted London's and other airports from prisoner of war sheds to some of the most attractive airport facilities in the world. After privatisation of the bus industry, investment is at record levels, with some of the major companies ordering literally thousands of new buses and reducing the age of the national fleet considerably. For many years freight, too—or a substantial portion of it—was in nationalised hands. It was the Conservative Government who liberated freight from the dead hand of the state.

In all those sectors, privatisation has been an enormous success, essentially because it delivers three great benefits. The first—often referred to as the only benefit by the Labour party, which grudgingly admits this—is the least important: the capital receipt to the taxpayer. It has never been the essential advantage of privatisation simply to sell off the family silver, as the late great Earl of Stockton once asserted. That was never the purpose of privatisation. It is, however, an enormously useful incidental benefit that when we do sell off businesses which have been not just family silver sitting in the sideboard, unused month after month, but a burden and drain on the taxpayer, we receive a considerable capital receipt and we improve the public coffers in two ways. The capital receipt allows the Chancellor of the Exchequer not to burden the taxpayer for that amount and the industries go on to contribute corporation tax rather than consume national resources.

On one occasion, I read an analysis showing that in the seven years up to, I believe, 1990 the former nationalised industries, which in the previous seven years had consumed £2.5 billion of subsidy, produced more than £2 billion-worth of corporation tax receipts to the Treasury—from a net outflow to almost the same net inflow. That is a pure, simple financial picture and an attractive one, but it is not, as I have said, the essence of the argument, which has always lain in the two other principal benefits of privatisation.

The second great benefit is the liberation of an industry from the constraints of the Treasury. Incidentally, that does not instantly make the people who work in the private sector more superhuman or better managers than those in the public sector. That would be insulting to the many good people who work well in the public sector, but they work within an extraordinarily artificial constraint. When over many years British Rail went to the Secretary of State for Transport and said, "Here is a case beyond argument for investment"—investment which in some cases could have been returned in full within two years—Labour and Conservative Chancellors were obliged to say, "Sorry, but there are simply too many other demands on the public purse to allow you that investment. The demands of hospitals, schools, social security, defence, local authority expenditure, whatever they may be, are all politically more demanding than investment in the nationalised industries."

Rail, therefore—as much as any of the other nationalised industries—suffered from the one classic mistake that the people who nationalised those industries in the 1940s innocently made. I make this point not in a simple, party political sense, but in all seriousness. Those who nationalised the industries in the late 1940s believed conscientiously that, when the industries were under the state's control, they would always have the investment that they needed because the state, a generous benefactor, would provide. Tragically, precisely the reverse happened. Those were the very industries that were starved of investment because successive Chancellors of all parties found themselves unable to satisfy the investment demand, consistent with the pressure on the public sector borrowing requirement.

The second greatest liberation to British Rail, therefore, is that independent private sector businesses, whether train operating companies, Railtrack or the leasing companies, can make an investment case, take it to the City or the banks—these days, the banks are worldwide—and say, "Here is an investment plan which justifies your giving us the resources to put in the investment and upgrade the service." With that investment comes operating efficiency, reduced cost, the ability to rationalise manpower and the ability, above all, to deliver a better service to passengers.

It is perhaps a sad indictment of the way in which Britain organises its national resource allocation—the process of Treasury control of expenditure—that it is unable to duplicate that regime in the public sector, but the system has failed Chancellors on both sides of the House, in every Government, since the war and there is no prospect of that regime changing either. It will be in the private sector that industries can invest, according to the sort of projects that they are able to bring to their investment bankers.

The third great improvement will deliver most benefit most immediately to the railway. Through privatisation, management is given a genuine incentive to manage a business and to develop a focus which, for generations, has been consistently absent from the railways, as even the anecdote of the hon. Member for Withington illustrated. It was often said that British Rail's motto was, "This would be a terrific business if it were not for the passengers." That illustrates the extraordinary sense of the railways having been, over the generations, just a system that was there, a marvellous job protection scheme, a business that we did in that way because we had always done it in that way. If passengers did not understand the complexity of the rail system, that was simply because they were ignorant and should have learnt.

Such inwardness is not unusual in a nationalised industry, whether in Britain or elsewhere, but it is enormously damaging to a business which should be trying to deliver what the customer wants. That is what the private sector lives or dies by. Either it delivers what its customers want or it does not survive. No business survives by telling the customers what they will want and trying to force that product on them.

How has the improvement occurred already in the privatised railway? I will give one example—the most telling that I can currently identify, bearing in mind my

experience over several years, particularly in London. Before rail privatisation, many people said to me, "We are worried that the consequence of rail privatisation will be that new private operators will denude the railway of staff." It was apparently assumed that all private sector operators would automatically reduce staff for the sake of it as though it were some sort of extraordinary religious nostrum. Those people also said, "The one thing that worries us about travelling on the railway, particularly in the evening, is the absence of staff." Here they were entirely right. That absence gives unmanned stations an extraordinary feeling of anarchy, an impression of no one caring and no one being concerned, an atmosphere of unease for the unwary passenger and of concern about any other passenger who might just arrive on the platform.

I said to those who expressed concern, "You will find that the train operating companies in the private sector will have to worry about getting more people on to the railway. They are likely to identify precisely this area of concern as one in which they will have to effect change. They will see the need to do so. I can assure you that the operating companies will respond in that way." Whatever my persuasive skills, I do not believe that people were necessarily convinced before the event. I am sure that when they left me they were thinking, "That sounded like yet another politician talking—the reality is that operators will remove staff for the sake of it."

Prism, the operator on the London-Tilbury-Southend line, recognised immediately that security was uppermost in the minds of passengers. What did it do? It embarked immediately on a £14 million programme—it is now known as "Operation Safeguard"—which put new security staff on trains and platforms. The effect of that has been to reduce what the company describes as "disturbance-related incidents". I am sure that we can all imagine what that means. Such incidents on the LTS line have already been reduced by 70 per cent. and I understand that Prism is now considering putting more staff back on stations and trains.

There are three female Labour Members in the Chamber, and they will perhaps accept that for women generally the issue of security is vital. Women were failed by British Rail. Within British Rail's accounting system, one group focused on revenue generation while another group concentrated on costs. The two groups never spoke. When considering cost reduction, it was said that the only approach was to take staff out of the system. That happened year after year. I do not believe that I am making any error when I say that British Rail even failed to live up to its own code of guidance on station staffing. Instead, it removed staff. Privatisation has ensured that staff have returned to where they belong—on stations and trains—has made the environment safer for those who travel and has led to new passengers using the railway.

Privatisation has led to a second advantage. During my four and a half years at the Department of Transport, I was keen to promote cycling. It is something that we do not do enough of in Britain. It is something that we have institutionally neglected. Governments of all persuasions have treated cycling almost with derision. Until recently cycling has not been accepted seriously as a part of the transport environment, which it so desperately needs to be.

The House knows that the history of British Rail in dealing with cycles is rather unattractive. British Rail has regarded the bicycle and the cyclist as irritants and has been extraordinarily unwilling to contemplate accommodating cyclists in all but those circumstances in which it was driven, either by embarrassment or by statute, to do so.

What has happened in the privatised railway system? Within weeks of taking on the franchise, Great Western Holdings has announced that it intends to make specific additional provision for cyclists. I will leave it to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), the chairman of the all-party cycling group, to elaborate on that if he is lucky enough to be called. I think that he will agree with me that those of us who believe that we should be promoting cycling are enormously gratified that one of the immediate responses of a new train operating company is to do something that has been overdue for decades.

Commercial opportunities are offered on the London to Gatwick British Rail services. There are three ways of getting from London to Gatwick by rail—the Gatwick Express, the Thameslink service and the old Network SouthEast and SouthCentral services. Since the Gatwick Express was used as the first pilot in the privatisation process—a great deal of attention was devoted to it—the service has attracted a considerable number of extra passengers. Some might say, "That is not surprising." It is perhaps less well known that it has also put additional passengers on both the other routes. The positive process of marketing rail as the way to travel to Gatwick airport—London's second largest airport and in many ways one of the most important tourism and holiday airports in the world—is succeeding, and everyone is benefiting.

The operators of the Gatwick Express are offering on-board check-in services to airport customers while they are on the train. That is exactly what those passengers want. They want a seamless and easy journey. The opportunity has been available for as long as the Gatwick Express has been running. Was it taken under the old regime? No, we could not do something like that: "That's airport stuff. It's not our territory. We run a railway, not a transport service." We now have a transport service.

The examples are legion. They are not confined to security, cycling or better ticketing. Freight is a good example. I remember talking to representatives of one of the companies now involved in the private freight industry on rail. They spoke to me and to my right hon. and hon. Friends about the freight industry. They said, "So long as you have a rail freight industry which says to customers, 'So long as you bring your goods to us in a 44-tonne container on Wednesdays before 3 o'clock and you don't mind too much whether they are delivered tomorrow, next week or the week after, we shall be happy to take your business,' you may not be entirely surprised when we say that that is not an attractive transport environment for most modern companies."

The companies' representatives then said, "What you have to do, if you want to make rail freight work, is to ask the market, as a rail freight operator, what it wants. There are acres of railway sidings that are now derelict. They are useless. They are not being used for anything. You can build all the railhead facilities that you want in those areas, including all the distribution depots and the general infrastructure. The logistics are there and you can offer what modern transport companies have to offer, which is a service from the production line to the customer's shop. You have to offer an integrated service."

[Mr. Norris]

We know that rail can be part of an integrated service, as it is in other parts of the world, especially in the United States. It is in the area of rail freight, even more than that of passenger services, where we shall see spectacular improvements in the volume of freight carried by rail. That is entirely consistent with the all-party conclusion that we definitely need to see a shift from road to rail and to public transport generally, whether we are talking about passengers or about freight.

In this debate the Government can claim beyond peradventure, as on so many other major issues that have faced us in the past 17 years, that we as Conservatives are right. We have been attacked ferociously, if somewhat inexpertly, by the Opposition, but we have been proved right. We have been proved right on rail, and we shall be proved right on so many other issues when we win the next general election.

11.18 am

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): It is always interesting when Members who have been Ministers for some years choose almost immediately to address the House on their own subject. It is unusual to do so, but having heard the saloon-bar stories of the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), it seems that he is not serious. It is rather sad that in this debate he should work so energetically to suggest that others should give him a job after the general election. I am sure, however, that he will be very successful.

The privatisation of British Rail should concern the taxpayer at every level. I shall begin by talking about Opraf, and especially the franchising director, who is leaving his post. The Government decided that they were going to go ahead with the privatisation of British Rail, almost irrespective of the cost to the taxpayer and the possible benefits. Not only did they give instructions to the franchising director that he should push at even greater speed than had originally been intended, but they twice quietly altered his terms by sending letters to him—which were placed in the Library, on one occasion after the House had risen for the summer recess—that had a direct effect on the way in which he was able to do his job.

I raised that issue with the Department, because I felt that it was totally unacceptable that a man whose duties had been set out and whose responsibilities had been debated by the House in considerable detail, and who was answerable to the House, should suddenly be given a letter that effectively said: "You may now do virtually what you like. You must take account of the general terms that we set out, as Secretaries of State, irrespective of the conditions that were applied to your original duties by the House of Commons." That is totally unacceptable. The Government got away with it because absolutely no attention was drawn to it.

Moreover, it is useful to study the evidence that has been given by the franchising director himself to the Public Accounts Committee, which will undoubtedly be the subject of considerable debate. It is sufficient to say that one of the items that became very clear was that the man, who was a banker—not, as one would think, one of those lower-middle-class workers one finds on the Opposition Benches—had often allowed the so-called "consultants" who were brought in to privatise British Rail to operate without any type of budget. In one case, he allowed them to receive payments of £2.24 million of taxpayers' money as "success" payments, on top of the consultancy fee that they were already receiving, which had not been specified before they entered into the job.

When the franchising director was asked by hon. Members to define exactly a "success payment", how it could be earned and why two firms received those enormous sums, he found the questions exceedingly difficult to answer. In debates such as this, it is vital that we point out to the taxpayer what is happening to his assets. As one listens to Conservative Members making extremely unimaginative speeches—which they imagine will do them some good in a general election—about a subject as basic as transport, one is struck by the fact that they never manage to mention the cost to the taxpayer. When the franchising director hands over millions of pounds to consultants in the City—not to improve the track, to buy new rolling stock or to put security people into stations to defend the noble womanhood of the United Kingdom, but merely to pay for consultants to hand over assets to the private sector—that is not spelt out in the detail given to taxpayers, and they really should be interested in that.

Mr. Norris: Is the hon. Lady somehow suggesting that the amount of subsidy required by the new privatised train operating companies is greater than the amount required by the old British Rail? Do not we already know that the train operating companies in the private sector are taking £2 billion less than the amount that was previously demanded by her great nationalised British Rail?

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has chosen to raise that issue. He and I know that, from the beginning of the privatisation, it was very clear that the subsidy from the taxpayer at the end of the franchise period would not be less than it had been under previous arrangements, but that it would be more. He knows that. He gave evidence to the Transport Select Committee that spelt out the figures and set down the timetable by which it would happen. He himself—no one else—knows that that is the reality. He knows that, in the initial few years, the taxpayers, having handed over enormous assets, may not have to pay up the same amount each year, but that, eventually, the taxpayers will pay not only as much as they paid for British Rail but consistently more.

We hear talk about how the new companies will import new rolling stock, provide new engines and make everything wonderful for passengers. Does it not also behove us to point out that those engines will not be made in the United Kingdom? One of the freight companies has made it very clear that it is interested only in importing American engines. So a nation that started railway engine design will be incapable of supplying any of the new firms.

Mr. Butterfill: Is the hon. Lady implying that, under the regime that may be heralded in by the unlikely event of a new Labour Government, companies in this country will be directed to buy their investment products from United Kingdom companies only?

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am telling Conservative Members something that anyone other than the hon. Gentleman

would know. There were companies under British Rail Engineering Ltd. capable of producing very high-quality rolling stock, which had full order books for engines and no difficulty in providing what was needed by United Kingdom rail companies. In the future, however, because of the deliberate rundown and sale of those assets, it will be extremely difficult to find sufficient British workmen to fulfil any order, from wherever it comes. If he does not know that, I will introduce him to the thousands of British Rail engineering workmen and women who have lost their jobs because of the specific political—there was no other reason—decisions taken by the Government.

Assurances were given at the Conservative party conference that tilting trains on the west coast main line would be one of the new results of privatisation. That is total fantasy. In answering a parliamentary question from me, the Minister confirmed that passenger service requirements for the InterCity west coast main line do not include requirements for trains to call at places such as Watford or Milton Keynes. The franchising director recently said that if the new high-speed trains run on the west coast main line, they will run straight through those stations, or perhaps make only one stop. When he was asked by a Conservative Member specifically what would happen to Crewe, he replied that Crewe would then be a parkway. That was his way of interpreting the fact that passenger service requirements would not be capable of producing current standards. It is very clear that if the privatisation goes ahead, Watford and Milton Keynes, for example, will lose their services to anywhere north of Birmingham.

In answer to a parliamentary question from me on the passenger service requirement, the Minister for Railways and Roads said that, when drawing up passenger service requirements, the franchising director is required, by his instructions and guidance from the Secretary of State, to consider each service individually and not services for the franchise as a whole. So to maximise carriage on the profitable parts of any system and to increase its attractiveness to any private buyer, the conditions laid down will not insist on the same level of care that we have had before or the same level of cover, but simply be a question of writing the terms in a manner that allows them to be exploited in any way by the potential buyers.

That leads me to a fundamental issue. I was delighted to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) talk about safety. It is clear that there will be a conflict of interests on safety in the privatised railway system. That is a real difficulty. Railtrack has some high-powered, well-trained and highly responsible railwaymen who have been involved in the real commitment of rail services to safety for many years. When they retire or move on, there will clearly be a different ethos in the railway system. It behoves the House to insist that responsibility for safety standards should be moved away from Railtrack. There should be a free-standing unit outside any existing Railtrack structures.

There are several reasons why that should be done. It is clear that the instinctive response of Railtrack to an accident is totally different from the response that came from the old British Rail. British Rail would accept responsibility for an accident from day one. It would say that there would have to be a proper investigation, but it took responsibility. The immediate response of Railtrack to any kind of problem—this has been evident in press notices on two separate occasions—is to say, "That is not Railtrack's responsibility," before it knows anything about the accident or the conditions.

The reason for that is clear: Railtrack is terrified that—

Dr. Marek: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The banter between the civil service Box and Back Benchers is still going on. It surely cannot be right. Is it not against the rules of the House?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have already ruled that the only person who may speak to the civil servants in the Box is the parliamentary private secretary—or someone acting as the parliamentary private secretary—giving information directly to a Minister. Can the Minister confirm that that is what has happened?

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. John Bowis): I have just been passed some notes exactly according to your ruling, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I hate to break into this erudite and important point. I thought that we were having a serious debate about railways. I hope that the to-ing and fro-ing of half a dozen Conservative members of what might be called the Friday gang, who are here simply to get their names into *Hansard*, irrespective of the subject matter, will mean that we shall hear less from them for the rest of the debate.

To put it simply, Railtrack is behaving totally differently on safety from how British Rail behaved. If there is an accident, Railtrack immediately says, "This has nothing to do with us," as it has done on two occasions. The reason is simple: it cannot afford to have its shares questioned on the stock exchange. It would regard with horror any suggestion that there might be a problem with an accident, particularly a major accident.

A detailed accident report was, in my view, deliberately leaked recently in an attempt to put the blame on a particular driver before the matter could be fully debated and before it had been reported to those with responsibility. That is disgraceful and unacceptable. Everybody in the railway system should be concerned about safety.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Dunwoody: In cases such as the accident at Stafford, for which no one will take responsibility until there have been months and months of argument between the fragmented parts of the railway system, those who suffer most are those who are in no way responsible.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Dunwoody: Some of the people who were moved out of their homes because of damage caused during the Stafford accident are still living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. No attempt has been made by Railtrack or any of the other relevant companies to sort out the situation.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the hon. Lady give way on the issue of safety?

Mrs. Dunwoody: Everyone who inquires about the effects of the non-payment of insurance or about any kind

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of assistance to the people most affected has been consistently referred to a firm that I cannot find in the telephone book. As far as I am concerned, that firm has some mysterious headquarters that cannot be located. British Rail would have taken responsibility immediately. Not only does Railtrack not accept responsibility, it refers everybody to a third party. That is unacceptable, leaving those concerned with real problems.

Those who live near the site of the Stafford crash have not yet received compensation. Railway Claims Ltd. does not insist that privately owned freight wagons are part of the insurance schemes. Anyone living alongside a railway ought to know that, in the event of a major accident involving privately owned freight wagons, they are extremely unlikely to receive compensation for many years after the issue has been debated in the courts of law. That is a retrograde step that should be deeply regretted by the House.

Other aspects of safety culture should also be debated. Who will undertake detailed research on safety in future? There will be continuing debate on whether it is the responsibility of one private company or another. To give a simple example, a great deal of work needs to be done on driver fatigue. That work was originally undertaken by British Rail, but the new incoming companies will clearly not be prepared to fund any such research.

British Rail estimated that a 20-year, network-wide automatic train protection system assessment would cost £759 million. Individual train operating companies will not be prepared to continue work on that system, although even the Government accepted that there could be a higher level of safety.

There is no suggestion that the old mark I rolling stock, which is widely used in the south-east, will be replaced at anything like the rate contemplated by British Rail. Many passengers will be not at all happy to discover that, in a serious accident, mark I rolling stock is likely to contribute to more injuries and provides fewer ways to solve the immediate problems of the passengers. It is clear that fragmentation has led to dangerous developments that the Government have not addressed.

Some aspects of safety are even stranger. Several train sets are waiting for safety case clearance by Railtrack. We have heard this morning about how much Railtrack and the operating companies are doing to improve the lot of the passengers. The reality is rather different. It was clear to the Health and Safety Executive that a lot of work needed to be done at Euston. It had to insist on a time scale for Railtrack to do it. In some instances, the time scale included finishing work on the tracks by Christmas this year. The result for passengers is plain—I recently arrived at Euston station at 7 am to find not just one, but two trains cancelled, with no prior warning to passengers and no concern for the inconvenience created for those wanting to use the west coast main line. That will get worse and worse because Railtrack has not invested the same amount in safety and is prepared to follow those dictates only where it is given strict instructions.

The privatisation of British Rail has led to some extraordinary incidents. I wonder how many members of the public know that the Ministry of Defence is hiding train sets for private owners. Because they do not have clearance, many privately owned train sets must be parked somewhere. Quite a few have been parked around Crewe station for some time, but many have been put on Ministry of Defence property and, in case that should be an embarrassment, they have been camouflaged.

If hon. Members think that I am exaggerating, they might like to know that when I asked the Ministry of Defence in whose interest those trains were being hidden, what was the cost and what was the taxpayer getting for that nice little camouflaged group, I received a marvellous letter from the Minister in the other place. He is, inevitably, an earl; I find that we never deal with less than a viscount in the present Government. Earl Howe wrote to me on 21 September and said:

"Thank you for your letter . . . regarding railway rolling stock stored at MOD sites.

Army depots of the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency at Bicester, Kineton, Longtown and Ludgershall, together with HQ Engineering Resources at Long Marston are storing railway rolling stock belonging to various Railway/Transport Companies. The MOD has been storing rolling stock for a number of years; the amount of rolling stock varies depending on the demand of the companies concerned. We are able to offer these companies the opportunity to use secure storage, free from vandalism whilst utilising our spare capacity to obtain good value for the Department and hence the taxpayer.

ABSDA is not aware of the rationale for storing particular rolling stock, (this is subject to the commercial decisions of the companies involved)".

How absurd. I wonder whether the Ministry of Defence is using that opportunity to improve on camouflage techniques. If the Government hide enough rolling stock, people will not know that the system is not working. They will not know that Railtrack is not clearing the safety case because it has no safety case people of its own and must employ consultants and, with any luck, the taxpayer will not know what is happening in the name of privatisation.

The £400 million that has already been spent on consultants, which could have provided us with an enormously efficient west coast main line with new rolling stock built in this country and supplied by British companies, will not be made available. If anyone doubts that the Government have undervalued the assets, they have only to look at Railtrack's returns. In fewer than eight months, it has managed to make an enormous profit while doing astonishingly little to make the railways more efficient. In addition, the Government have handed out bags of gold to City companies of accountants or bankers who know nothing about railways and have no interest in individual passengers but are concerned only with how to make money out of state assets. Those who work in City firms, particularly firms of accountants, have good reason to support privatisation: it has provided a large amount of their income for the past four or five years. Passengers standing around waiting for a safe, clean, efficient train, however, may not think it such a good idea.

This has not been a serious debate and I am saddened that Tory Members chose to make a knockabout of what they consider a suitable political vehicle in the run-up to a general election. Our transport system deserves better and passengers deserve a great deal better. The sooner we get rid of this extraordinary lot and get back to operating a responsible railway system, the better.

11.45 am

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): It is always interesting to follow the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). I was fascinated that she did

not have the courtesy to accept interventions. That is entirely a matter for her, but I was reflecting on the appropriateness of the fact that we read today that someone who is quoted as being a senior Labour Member writing under the pseudonym of Cassandra says that the

"mutual loathing between Tony Blair, John Prescott, Gordon Brown, Robin Cook and Margaret Beckett is so blatant it has become public knowledge."

I wonder whether that is why the hon. Lady did not take interventions—could Cassandra be her?

When I think of the politics of envy, I think first of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich. We have just heard a classic example of the genre, running down everything that is happening in the transport system, especially the great progress made on the railways in recent years. The hon. Lady may represent one of those few dinosaurs of the left who, having become a junior Minister in the days of the first Wilson Government, has seen her entire political career, which she thought so promising, waste away in 17 years of opposition. She was once a promising rising star; she is now a dinosaur condemned for ever to oblivion.

The hon. Lady made some interesting observations about safety. She suggested that there was something wrong with the public finding out that a driver involved in a recent tragic accident had an appalling record and had had several warnings about going through red lights, which he clearly did in that accident. If the hon. Lady seriously wants better service for the public and safety on the railways, it cannot be wrong for the public to be aware that a driver had a series of warnings for precisely the same kind of problem that led to that accident. I doubt whether British Rail passengers would agree with her suggestion that it is wrong for that to be in the public domain. That disposes of much of her nonsense about safety.

We heard weasel words from the shadow Transport Minister, the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), who opened the debate. His words about Labour policy sounded fine—words such as "strategic" and "integrated"—full of sound and fury, but signifying precisely nothing.

Mr. Jessel: Has not my hon. Friend left out the word "comprehensive"?

Mr. Hawkins: Indeed. It is a word beloved of so many Labour politicians, and it has always spelt disaster in education, as it would in rail if the Labour party ever had control over that area.

The crucial point about the anecdote that the shadow Transport Minister told in his opening speech was that, despite confusion over the telephone, the people concerned reached their destination on time. Moreover, they had two hours extra at Stansted airport. If the best that Opposition Front Benchers can do is tell a story of people who get to their destination on time and have two hours extra to enjoy the excellent facilities that the private sector has provided at Stansted airport, it shows the bankruptcy of their arguments.

I return to the crucial issue of the benefits that rail privatisation has produced. For many years before I came to the House, I campaigned for improvements to passenger services on the railways and worked with passenger consultative committees, transport users consultative committees and other campaigning groups. Thus I have been delighted in my first Parliament to see the Government delivering, with the great support of hon. Members such as my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), the benefits to passengers that we all knew would flow from involving the proper use of commercial entrepreneurship on the railways. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend; one of the few difficulties about speaking in a debate in which he has spoken earlier is that all the best arguments have been used and have been put far better than I could put them.

I want to mention some of the specific benefits that the taxpayer would never have had if the railways had remained under state control. Opposition Members do not understand how railways can be run commercially for the benefit of passengers, because so few of them have had any direct business experience; they all still believe that state control, which has failed throughout the world and has led to the death of socialism in eastern Europe and many other places, is in some way a redeeming feature of their policy, and that profit is a dirty word.

Opposition Members do not understand that, to provide benefits for consumers in a capitalist system, there have to be people who are prepared to take the commercial risk and one has to ensure that benefits and improvements to services can be funded by investment. That is what profit is all about; it produces risk takers who will provide the risk capital to produce benefits for passengers. That is what the new privatised system is all about.

Railtrack is going ahead with core modernisation programmes on the west coast main line, amounting to £1.3 billion. If Opposition Members seriously think that they could have got that kind of money from a Labour Chancellor, if we were ever unfortunate enough to have one, they can dream on: it would never have happened, because only the private sector can produce £1.3 billion of badly needed investment.

Railtrack has already awarded two parallel contracts for the signalling and control system to Transig, a consortium of ABB Transportation and Westinghouse Signals, and to a consortium of GEC Alsthom and Siemens. The main contract letting will begin late this year or early next year, and the work will start next year. There is no way that any Labour Chancellor could have promised that under a nationalised system; it would never have happened.

The infrastructure investment agreement between the franchising director and Railtrack for the upgrading of passenger facilities on the west coast main line, with tilting trains and dramatically reduced journey times, was signed on 7 October. Opraf is aiming to award the 15-year franchise for InterCity West Coast in March next year, and the benefits of the upgrade will flow to passengers over the next few years. Railtrack is discussing options for the freight usage of the west coast main line with the Department of Transport, and work on the freight upgrade plan is expected to be continued shortly.

It is essential, as those of us know who sometimes use the west coast main line and sometimes use the roads, to get more heavy freight off the M6 and on to the railways. That is already starting to happen from the Trafford Park terminal, as my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) pointed out, and it will increase as the infrastructure improvements come through. That will be of great benefit to those involved in long-haul freight, maximising the usefulness of the channel tunnel, and to

[Mr. Hawkins]

all rail users in the midlands. I have seen for myself how much benefit there would be in terms of improved journey times on the roads if the heavy lorries for long-haul freight were taken off the M6 as much as possible.

There will be great benefits for British industry, especially in parts of the north-west, from using the channel tunnel. Long-haul freight going, for example, from Italy to the north-west and vice versa, can be made much more economic. It was always inevitable once the channel tunnel opened that economies of scale for long-haul rail freight would be improved dramatically, and much more heavy freight is now going by rail.

The channel tunnel is yet another example of a project that could never have existed except under a Conservative Government and with the help of the private sector. Opposition parties would never have got it built; the risk capital would never have been raised. The solution for rail freight in this country is the existence of the channel tunnel, and the upgrade that the private sector is producing for major trunk routes that run to the tunnel, such as the west coast main line, is vital.

The rail freight business is nearly completely privatised. Rail Express, Freightliner and Trainload Freight have all been sold and British Rail intends to sell Railfreight Distribution around the turn of the year. There is no doubt that Freightliner and the other companies have recorded notable successes in attracting new freight to the railways. Both Freightliner and EWS have plans for new investment that demonstrate their belief in rail's future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest drew attention in his splendid speech to the problems that many companies had in trying to place freight contracts with British Rail. As he rightly said, freight could be delivered by British Rail only if the customer agreed to a specific day and a specific time when the train would turn up.

We had proof positive of that in evidence given a few years ago to the Select Committee on Transport by Castle Cement in Lancashire, which said that it did not want to have to despoil rural Lancashire with fleets of heavy lorries, but was forced to do so, because whenever it tried to use the railways, the driver would turn up at the wrong time and the business of delivering cement to the other end of the country for a construction site was time sensitive. The driver would turn up sometimes several hours late and would then say, "I'm sorry, I've now got to take the engine all the way back to the depot because it needs some more diesel fuel." That was the pattern of freight on the old nationalised railways; that customer had been forced for the survival of its own business and the delivery of its services to invest in heavy lorries in which it did not want to invest.

The privatised freight business can be sensitive to customers' needs; they need not be dependent on when the driver turns up and there is a guarantee that the service level that they want will be provided. The scale of Railfreight's acute losses made the write-off of tunnel freight investment inevitable; it would have happened under any Government, regardless of our proceeding with privatisation.

Railtrack expects to spend no less than £8 billion over the next five years to maintain and improve the network. Even that huge sum does not include enhancement projects such as Thameslink 2000. Privatised Railtrack receives income from the franchised train operating companies through access charges and has access to wider sources of private finance to fund infrastructure schemes. It is essential that we continue with that process of investment.

Railtrack's current commitment to a safe and efficient railway will be continued because it can raise money on the private sector capital market. The key aim of privatisation is to improve the quality of service on the railways. As my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest rightly said, it is customers who matter, not a rail system that appeared for so many years, until privatisation, to be run for the convenience of the employees rather than passengers.

Before I came to the House, I worked for many years with many dedicated rail employees who cared about customers, but the biggest concern expressed to transport users consultative committees year after year was about the poor quality of front-end contact with passengers, the lack of information, and the fact that people on the station platforms did not seem to care. When people travel on privatised services such as Gatwick Express, Great Western or Midland MainLine, which I discussed with my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) only the other day, they notice how vastly improved the services are. My home town is on the latter line. I know that the improved service is of dramatic benefit to the people who use it. It is not only quicker and more efficient; the attitude of customers to the provision of service to passengers is much improved.

On the Midland MainLine, there are plans to run 22 extra services each weekday between London and Leicester. That is only one example; similar examples are to be found all over the new privatised railway. Some, such as the London-Tilbury-Southend line, which as my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest said is now run by Prism Rail, have improved security at stations. I commuted on that line for a while. There were rarely station staff in the evening to protect passengers travelling late at night and there were several serious incidents. Each of those reduced the number of passengers. Now that we have the extra staff to ensure security, I am sure that passengers travelling on the line will feel much safer. It is an improved service and more people will be prepared to use it, especially, as my hon. Friend said, ladies who have to travel late at night from the City back to their homes in Essex.

Many companies are investing in improved rolling stock. National Express Group plans to introduce a new fleet of rolling stock for the Gatwick Express service by 1989. NEG is also refurbishing the existing high-speed fleet on the midland main line and will introduce additional rolling stock to provide the extra services that I mentioned. On south-eastern services, Connex will undertake rolling stock investment worth about £400 million to replace all the slam-door stock within the 15-year life of the franchise, starting with the oldest stock shortly.

There is a rolling programme of further investment and improvement that no Chancellor of the Exchequer would have been able to afford from taxpayers' funds. Only by raising private sector money in the capital markets can such investment be provided. On Network SouthCentral, new off-peak and Sunday services for south London by the London and South Coast railway are planned. There is support from the franchising director of £85 million

in the first year of the franchise. There is an improved passengers charter, with high punctuality standards, and £10 million of investment in improvements, including the refurbishment of stations and car parks, for which customers are desperately keen. That includes enhanced security for passengers.

Safety on the railways is not only about preventing bad accidents when trains collide or are derailed, important though that is, but about safety for passengers who use trains, stations and car parks. Network SouthCentral will have a centrally co-ordinated passenger information system, with public address and display systems at stations.

On the south-eastern service, Connex is planning to invest a further £25 million in one section, with station improvements including enhancements to passenger security, ticketing systems and car parking. It will improve punctuality standards for the Kent link and services on the Kent coast.

I have used Thames Trains recently to travel to conferences. Victory Holdings plans to increase the frequency of the Oxford to Paddington service to make it half-hourly, and to introduce additional services between Thatcham, Theale, Newbury and Paddington from 1998. Services between Reading and Gatwick are being improved. There will be additional off-peak fast services to Maidenhead and improvements in Reading to London journey times.

Our new silicon Thames valley, one of the hearts of British investment, is one of the areas where people who travel to London want improved services. They are coming because the railways are in the private sector, where improvements can be provided for passengers. The grant of £33 million to Victory Holdings in the first year of operation will decline to zero by the end of the seven-and-a-half-year franchise term. That shows how much more efficiently the private sector can operate railways. In the old days, everything depended on the huge taxpayers' subsidy.

What of the Liberal Democrats? As always, they will tell potential voters one thing in one part of the country and another in another.

Mr. Robathan: As we are discussing transport, does my hon. Friend think that that applies in Newbury, where the Liberal Democrats seem to support the Newbury bypass? Many people, especially around Newbury, are concerned about that. I thought that the Liberal Democrats wanted to get people on to trains and off the roads, and did not want to build new roads.

Mr. Hawkins: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I mentioned the improved services between Newbury and Paddington. I wonder whether the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) will welcome that benefit of privatisation. The important point about the double standards of the Liberal Democrats is that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) said:

"Liberal Democrats will buy back 51 per cent. of the shares in Railtrack"—

and this is rather puzzling—

"at the issue price or the market price, whichever is less."

That is an odd understanding of the way in which the market works, and I wonder whether it is not a case of Ashdown but mark down. Despite the Liberal Democrats' promise to renationalise the railways, the Liberal Democrat-controlled council on the Isle of Wight has suddenly welcomed the fact that its rail service was among the first to benefit from franchising. How is that for the kind of Liberal Democrat hypocrisy that we are so used to seeing in the House and across the country?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest rightly said, so many people said at first that rail privatisation could not work, and then that it should not work. Customers are now saying that it is working, and it is a great and signal success.

12.4 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I am pleased to have the opportunity to follow the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) as it enables me to deal with some of the nonsense with which he rather spoiled the closing moments of his speech.

We have made it clear as a party that we can see potential advantages in a public-private sector partnership investing in and running the railways, particularly as far as the train operating companies are concerned. That has been our position for some years. We have made it equally clear that we do not believe that the freehold for the rail infrastructure should be entirely in private hands. We believe that major investment decisions on our strategic transport corridors—be they road or rail—should not be in the hands of a private owner, whose prime objective must be to maximise profit to shareholders rather than to serve the transport interests of this country. I hope that that is clear to the hon. Member for Blackpool, South and that he is now satisfied.

Mr. Norris *rose—*

Mr. Chidgey: I shall give way to the recently retired Minister, who may now have been promoted to parliamentary private secretary.

Mr. Norris: I thank the hon. Gentleman, who shows his customary courtesy, but I ask him to reflect on the point that he has just made. If the freeholds had been transferred to Railtrack in a way that allowed it to dispose of them without the slightest consideration of the needs of the railway, that would indeed have been—to say the least—irresponsible and, others might say, downright dangerous, but under the statutory regime the regulator ensures that Railtrack cannot dispose of freehold property, or any other property, in a way that would adversely impact on the railways. Surely that is quite different.

Mr. Chidgey: The hon. Gentleman made two points, which I shall try to answer. First, he referred to regulation of Railtrack's property assets. I am concerned about the amount of profit from property development that can be passed to shareholders. I would welcome Railtrack developing its excess property, but I am concerned that the regulations are insufficient to ensure that much of the profit is redirected into rail investment. Under the present regulations, I doubt that that will be possible, but it must be addressed.

I can answer the hon. Gentleman's second point directly by saying that great concern has been expressed about the way in which Railtrack is dealing with the interests of major freight hauliers and access to the rail

[Mr. Chidgey]

network. It is clear that Railtrack is not motivated to encourage extra freight on the railways, where it foresees better profits from passenger services. It is not in the interests of the nation's transport system that those decisions be made on the basis of immediate profit, and that is why we are adamant that there must be some public control over the development of the rail network.

There is no dispute among hon. Members that an efficient, attractive and expanding railway is essential to sustainable passenger transport. It is agreed that the Government's programme of rail privatisation is a key factor in determining whether we rise to the challenges of initiating fundamental change in travel patterns, maximising rail travel and reducing congestion and pollution on the roads.

That is the issue. Let me set the scene by recalling the main objectives that the Government set the franchising director when the Railways Act 1993 was passed: to secure an overall improvement in the quality of rail passenger and station services, encourage efficiency and economy in the provision of railway services and promote the use and cost-effective development of the railway network. Most important, the 1993 Act placed a duty on the franchising director to secure value for money in achieving those objectives.

Have the objectives been achieved? Has there been an overall improvement in quality, the development of the network and the level of service? Has Opraf secured value for money in the award of franchises and has it controlled the cost of advisers?

According to the central rail users consultative committee, punctuality deteriorated last year on 33 routes out of 59. On the InterCity west coast main line, one in five trains was late by 10 minutes or more.

When Parliament considered the Railways Bill, the Government promised that existing services would be protected. On 11 February 1993, the then Minister for Public Transport, the right hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), said that the franchises would be based on the 1994 timetable, that the franchising director would not be given discretion to pick and choose and that he would have to start with the existing timetable.

When the passenger service requirements were published, however, it was found that they gave massive scope for cuts in service. That was successfully challenged by some groups in the courts, but rather than accepting that they may have been wrong the Government responded by quickly changing the instructions to Opraf—in effect, moving the goalposts.

Across the country, the PSRs now allow operators to make significant cuts, should they choose to do so. For example, under the cross-country passenger service requirement, they are entitled to scrap services to Didcot, Kensington, Manchester airport, Poole, Weymouth and Blackpool. On the west coast main line they can axe InterCity services to Watford and Milton Keynes. We are not convinced that the objectives on the quality of service are being achieved.

The much-vaunted fare cap fails to protect a wide range of railcards and discount fares. Only one quarter of InterCity tickets, one quarter of Great Western tickets and less than half of South West Trains tickets are protected by a fares cap. More and more passengers are suffering from the fragmentation of the network.

Mr. Norris: I very much appreciate the hon. Gentleman's contribution; it is always considered and worth listening to. With reference to the so-called protection of discount fares, is it the case that the only one of the discount fare offers that was a net cost to British Rail was the disabled persons railcard? It cost British Rail about £3.6 million a year. A private operator might not take on an obligation that was just a cost, so that was specifically protected in the 1993 Act. An operator must provide that discount. All the other discount offer cards—the Supersavers, the pensioners' offers, the student offers—were profitable marketing enterprises. There was no need to protect a normal marketing enterprise that was making money for the railways. That is precisely what we should let the private sector get on with.

Mr. Chidgey: I followed the Minister's—I am sorry, the habit dies hard; I should say the hon. Gentleman's—intervention carefully, but it is difficult to follow his argument. The discount fares offered on the British Rail network were intended to fill available capacity throughout the working day or evening. We are concerned that the availability of rail services will be undermined by a failure to protect discount facilities. I am not aware of any evidence showing that all the discount fares offered previously under the British Rail regime and by regional companies were profitable—although that may be so.

More and more passengers are suffering as a result of fragmentation of the rail network. It is estimated that a third of all inter-city journeys involve a change of train—that is a sad reflection on what we hoped to achieve. A Railtrack South West employee, writing to a customer regarding inter-city train journeys and changes of train, said:

"Different train companies do not generally operate a connections policy for passengers using other companies' trains".

It is hardly surprising that passenger complaints increased by 14.5 per cent. last year to their highest level ever.

Let us consider some track maintenance and safety issues. The Rail Regulator gave evidence before a recent meeting of the Transport Select Committee and reported that expenditure in 1994-95 on the renewal of assets covered by Railtrack's asset maintenance plan—that point was mentioned earlier—was £150 million below the level required in the medium term to maintain the performance of the network. The regulator said that he had made it clear to Railtrack that he would want to be satisfied that the company had plans in place to achieve the increase in expenditure needed to maintain current performance, yet Railtrack underspent again in the following year by £127 million, making a total underspend of £277 million—more than 25 per cent. of the asset maintenance plan's budget.

That can only compromise safety and maintenance standards. I am concerned about a recent report issued by Railtrack senior engineering and operating managers. They kept a dossier of potentially dangerous incidents of which they became aware during the current year—such was their concern about the way in which maintenance

standards were slipping. They revealed that, in the first seven months of the year

"90 potentially dangerous incidents . . . could have resulted in catastrophic accidents across the network of Britain's railways."

Those senior engineering managers have no axe to grind: they are simply concerned about ensuring an efficient, modern and safe rail network. They believe that those incidents are

"only the tip of the iceberg".

In his evidence to the Transport Select Committee, the Rail Regulator said that, two years on from the Railways Act 1993, he believed that there were no excuses. There are no excuses for falling standards of maintenance and safety on our railways.

Conservative Members have made great play this morning of what has been achieved by introducing private sector investment into our rail operations and services. As I have said before, I welcome such private and public sector involvement, which has many potential benefits, but the picture is not as rosy as Conservative Members claim.

We must remember that the ROSCOs were sold for £1.8 billion, with a guaranteed yearly return of £800 million for seven years—that is a pretty good deal by anyone's standards. I am concerned that no obligation was placed on those companies to do any more than maintain the stock that they had bought in its present condition. They are under no obligation to invest in new stock. The sale of the Porterbrook ROSCO to Stagecoach is a case in point. I resent Conservative Members assuming that no Opposition Member has run a business or hired staff. They should know better—perhaps they could pass an eye over "Dod's Parliamentary Companion" occasionally. I do not mind if somebody makes a profit out of a good operation that provides a reasonable service, is cost-effective and gives good value to the customer, but I object when the people who are supposed to be the guardians of our national resources show incompetence and allow our assets to be flogged off at knockdown prices, and other people come along and make a huge killing within months of the sale. That is incompetence and no business would employ any person who made such mistakes, so let us get that into perspective before we go any further.

Mr. Butterfill: Can the hon. Gentleman suggest a mechanism, short of inviting the highest bids, whereby we could obtain higher bids for the assets than anybody in the market was prepared to pay?

Mr. Chidgey: The hon. Gentleman makes a nice point. Let us be absolutely direct about this—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer him."] If Conservative Members will allow me to do so, I will certainly attempt to answer the hon. Gentleman's question.

When an asset is sold for some £500 million and a few months later suddenly acquires a 60 per cent. increase in value, surely we can accept that the advisers got it wrong. The advisers, who were paid from an open-ended budget, were still paid, despite the fact that their advice was massively wrong. That is another key issue on which hon. Members might like to reflect.

Under its franchise, South West Trains, which provides rail services in my region, was obliged to replace only some 5 per cent. of its rolling stock. That is hardly surprising, because its franchise is limited to seven years. It is recognised in the industry that rolling stock generally has a life of about 40 years. It is hardly reasonable to expect a company to make a major investment in rolling stock with a working life of 40 years when it is faced with the prospect of its contract being terminated in seven.

I do not know who decided to limit most of the franchises to seven years, but I suspect that the dead hand of the Treasury was involved. It is a pity that we could not have had a more sensible approach to getting more investment in our railways. South West Trains has to cope with a fleet of rolling stock predominantly of mark I coaches—the old slam-door coaches, which were condemned after the Clapham rail crash. It was made clear that any crash involving mark I slam-door coaches is likely to increase the number of injuries and deaths among the passengers unfortunate enough to be travelling at the time. In the Clapham accident report, inspectors made it quite clear that they wished all mark I coaches to be withdrawn from the network by 1997, yet in November 1996 at least 2,500 mark I coaches are still trundling around the network. Why did not the franchising director consult the Health and Safety Executive before drawing up South West Trains' franchise? Why was not the opportunity taken to bring in private investment to rid the railways of those death traps?

I now deal with the steps that are being taken to promote the use of railways. The hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan)—our bicycling friend on the Conservative Benches—made a point about the closure of stations under British Rail. He went back to the 1960s, but I did not think he was around in those days. Nevertheless, let us get the record straight. Between 1970 and 1994, British Rail reopened more than 250 railway stations. Recent surveys have estimated a need for a further 650. If the trend established by British Rail had continued, over the life of the current franchises we could have expected at least another 30 stations to have opened, but for the first six franchises that have been let only two new stations are promised over the next seven years.

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Gentleman gives way with his usual courtesy. I exempt him from the accusation of having anything to do with the £198 a ticket lunch at his party's conference. I am sure that he is far too decent for that.

The hon. Gentleman harked back to British Rail. I am delighted to say that it has reopened some stations. Indeed, one of the 15 stations in my constituency that closed in the 1960s and early 1970s has been reopened. I now have one where I used to have 15. The hon. Gentleman is a civil engineer and he has an historic interest in civil engineering. In his constituency, I suspect that he could walk along the old track from Botley to Bishop's Waltham, but when we were born we could have taken a train. Indeed, he could have taken a train from Eastleigh via Romsey to Andover, and via Winchester to New Alresford. We can no longer do that, because those lines were shut by that marvellous old institution, British Rail, to which he harks back with such fondness.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I thought that the hon. Member's intervention was leading to a point, but it is a mini-speech.

Mr. Chidgey: The hon. Member for Blaby made a delightful intervention, apart from his unfortunate comment about some lunch or other. I have never been to

[Mr. Chidgey]

a Tory party conference—I do not wish to go to one—but I imagine that people rent space to lay out their wares in the hope of catching the eye of the odd Tory party member. Some people may even pay 10,000 quid for lunch with the Prime Minister, but that is up to them.

The substance of the hon. Gentleman's intervention was the closure of railway lines. When we consider the reorganisation of our rail network, we should go as far back as the changes made by Dr. Beeching, which related to the change in our social and working patterns. I do not want the hon. Gentleman to get the impression that I am a great believer in traditional British Rail: I am not. I welcomed the restructuring of British Rail and the introduction of the regional companies, which were doing so well with the degree of independence that they were given.

I am glad that the hon. Gentleman mentioned my patch. Hampshire county council has, for many years, supported a strategy to reopen stations. It had great plans before the privatisation process began. In Eastleigh, strenuous efforts were made to reopen the Chandler's Ford station, which may have been on the list to which the hon. Gentleman referred. We wanted to run services from Romsey over the existing freight line to connect with the London main line to Eastleigh station. The privatised company, South West Trains, is now in charge. It provides a bus service to Winchester as an alternative. It is owned by a bus company, after all, but what a shame that we lost the opportunity to invest in a new station in an area of my constituency that has grown tremendously in the past 10 years.

The underlying restriction on the development and improvement of services by opening new stations has been Railtrack's profit-hungry policy. In 1994, the typical cost of a new, two-platform station was about £280,000. In two years it jumped to an average price of £500,000. That is a 77 per cent. increase in the cost of a simple station in under two years, which does not provide value for money. It is hardly an example of promoting the use and cost-effective development of the rail network.

The major issue is whether Opraf has secured value for money in the award of franchises. To what extent has rail privatisation secured value for money? We must first fix the criteria on which we measure that. It is generally accepted that it is necessary to measure the cost to the nation of the privatised railway services this year and in future years, and then to compare that with the cost that used to be incurred by British Rail. It is a relatively simple, benchmarking exercise, which compares changed circumstances with a base line. However, the National Audit Office failed to do that.

The Select Committee on Transport accepted the report and accounts of British Rail for 1993-94—the year before privatisation—as the relevant benchmark for judging the financial success of rail privatisation. That was not a good year for the railways, as the country was still locked in a deep recession, but it was the year in which Railtrack was separated. In that year, the cost to the public purse of running our railways, including the money paid via the passenger transport executives in England and Scotland, amounted to £1,057 million.

During that year, British Rail borrowed about £600 million. The Minister confirmed that most of that money was to pay for services connected with the channel tunnel, and was nothing to do with the domestic rail service operation.

In its recent report, the National Audit Office failed to bring out that fact. It included the borrowings as if they were part of the costs of providing domestic rail services. That is a serious flaw. It seems that the National Audit Office, which should know better, has been taken in by the Government's hype.

Since 1993-94 the accounting process has changed. Charges for the use of the track and for leasing the rolling stock now provide for a form of current cost accounting—the modern equivalent of asset valuation. That provides sufficient money to maintain and renew the assets. British Rail never enjoyed such a privileged position, nor do any of the local authorities that are responsible for road maintenance.

The new, somewhat creative accountancy arrangements mean that the cost of providing railway services increased substantially. In 1994-95, these costs, including those incurred by the passenger transport executives, rose to £2,055 million, and in 1995-96 the figure was £1,973 million. Those costs included the nominal profits which, until BR was broken up and sold off, had been returned to the Treasury.

The changes in accounting practice, the separation of the international operations of the European passenger services and Union Rail, the huge write-off of debts, sale proceeds, the enormous and unlimited payments to lawyers, consultants and advisers and the payment of profits to the Government before subsidiaries were sold make it very difficult to be clear about the continuing cost of providing domestic railway services in future years. However, to establish whether the taxpayer is getting value for money we have to strip away all the one-off financial transactions and look to the years ahead when the franchising director and the PTEs are buying railway services. To set a value-for-money benchmark, a judgment must be made about the level of efficiency improvement that BR could reasonably have achieved if railways had remained in the public sector.

In his evidence to the Public Accounts Committee the franchising director, Mr. Roger Salmon, suggested that an efficiency gain of 3 per cent. per annum would be an appropriate assumption. It is a much more modest achievement than that made by BR as an integrated concern in 1992-94, when it achieved 9 per cent. If we accept Mr. Salmon's figures and project them forward, it gives us a benchmark against which we can compare the financial performance of the new franchised railway.

In terms of borrowing to finance domestic rail services, BR was repaying its loans for domestic rail services on time and was expected to be able to continue to do so. Therefore, we can establish a benchmark that is based on BR's 1993 performance and use it to measure the financial success of franchising. BR, with its improved efficiency of 3 per cent., would have reduced its costs from £1,067 million to just over £800 million per annum and could have continued to provide services.

The payments from public funds to franchises have two sources. A vote goes directly to the franchising director and money passes through the passenger transport executives. The latter sum is £281 million for 1996-97

and was not included in the National Audit Office figures, which is misleading. Recent answers to my parliamentary questions have shown that the cost to the taxpayer of the first 13 franchises will be £203 million in the year 2003-4. That includes the best performing franchises and we can expect the remaining 12 franchises to cost considerably more, taking into account payments from the franchising director and the PTEs and assuming that the franchises deliver the service that they are supposed to deliver.

It is clear from the figures that the franchising director's claim to the Public Accounts Committee to have saved £1.7 billion of taxpayers' money is unfounded. To save such an amount, it would be necessary over the next seven years for the franchised service to be delivered at an average cost of £250 million a year less than it would have cost if BR had continued to operate the system. In 1997-98, the first 13 franchises will cost the franchising director £505 million yet, under British Rail, we could have expected the whole system to have cost only £945 million. Are we to believe that the rest of the franchises will cost only the difference of £440 million and that over the first seven years savings of some £1.7 billion will be made? That is plainly fantasy and a smokescreen that the Public Accounts Committee has failed to penetrate.

Parliament and the taxpayer must be fully aware that railway privatisation is not the bargain that the Government would have us believe, working as they do on the premise that few people understand what is being done with public money. A simple projection of the full cost to the taxpayer of the franchised railway against the BR benchmark reveals that it could take several Parliaments before the true cost of the privatised service becomes less than that of BR, year on year. By that time, most Conservative Members will no longer sit in this place.

12.34 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): My constituents, like those of the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey), use South West Trains. What they want is trains that are safe, punctual and pleasant, and they do not want their trains to be a financial burden on themselves and everyone else as taxpayers.

On punctuality, South West Trains, run by Stagecoach, are now more on time. The proportion arriving at Waterloo within five minutes of when they are due has gone up from 89 per cent. a year ago to 93 per cent. now. The frequency, by and large, with some exceptions, has not diminished. For example, at St. Margaret's, the frequency is still every half hour throughout the evening. That is just one of the eight stations in my constituency on the Waterloo line—the others being Fulwell, Hampton, Hampton Wick, Strawberry Hill, Teddington, Twickenham and Whitton.

I am worried about one thing and I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London would give his attention to this point. Under nationalisation, every time there was a freezing winter, the points seized up with ice, and the trains were delayed and were sometimes taken off altogether. It was as though the British were taken by surprise by the arrival of winter—in contrast with the Canadians, for example, who seem to expect cold weather and are able to cope with it each year. I should like to ask the Minister if he is willing to undertake to approach the privatised train companies and ask them what preparations they have made for a cold winter so that if that takes place—and winter is coming—the public, who need their trains to be more reliable in inclement weather, can be protected from the poor performance of the nationalised trains in the past in dealing with cold weather. I would hope that privatisation would be more efficient.

I went on the first privatised train of South West Trains. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport came to Twickenham one Sunday morning in February at about 5 o'clock in the morning and got on the first train from Twickenham to Waterloo. I may have been mad to get up and join that train at 4 or 5 o'clock on a Sunday morning, but that is what I did. I have kept the ticket. The train has run rather well ever since. Before privatisation, of course, there were scares galore, as my hon. Friend the Minister of State mentioned. Everyone was forecasting doom and gloom, irregular and infrequent services running late and often taken off, dirty carriages and no attention to the needs and wishes of customers; but every time there has been a privatisation, the Jeremiahs have been confounded, and they were on this occasion. That was so, too, for privatisation of British Airways, as has been mentioned, the airports, electricity, telephones, gas or any other industry: there have been ghastly forecasts of doom and gloom beforehand, with Opposition Members fomenting and stirring up people's fears and anxieties that the service might deteriorate, but it has hardly ever happened—indeed, I do not believe that it has happened at all. The privatisations have all been successful and are now broadly accepted. The same is true of the rail privatisation. We all had alarming letters six, nine and 12 months ago, but the complaints have all disappeared and there are hardly any at all now.

I happen to have been brought up in a nationalised industry, the Royal Navy, and I am perhaps less fanatical about privatisation than some of my colleagues. I have some reservations about it, but I think that I have been proved wrong as it has gone extremely well. I rather like having royal trains and the Royal Mail going by train, and making sure that the Queen's face is kept on our stamps and, even more importantly, on our bank notes. I regard myself as a subject and not as a citizen. I do not much care for the word "citizen", which reminds me of the French revolution—one of the worst things that ever happened in the history of the world.

There was great romance attached to railways. People loved the trains, the old Great Western Railway trains and Brunel's bridges and viaducts. Some of that romance seems to have gone as people now seem to see trains merely as a service, as though one were buying something in a shop; yet it is important, when buying a service, to get the results delivered, and that seems to be happening.

I wish to take up a few local matters and to ask my hon. Friend the Minister to raise these with Stagecoach and with South West Trains. First, I am very pleased about the coming renovation of Hampton Wick station. At Twickenham station, however, although I acknowledge some improvements, a waiting room has been turned into a buffet. This means that the waiting room facility is being curtailed and that after 9 pm on weekdays, 4 pm on Saturdays and all day on Sundays there will be no waiting room facility. That would be regrettable in such a large, important and well-used station. I hope that the company can be persuaded to take another look at that.

[Mr. Toby Jessel]

Next, at Waterloo station, the cab rank is not efficient. This is because it is so extensively used. There is such a large number of passengers queuing for the taxis, and such a large number of taxis queuing for the passengers, that they are not married together nearly quickly enough. Typically, a person in the taxi queue has to wait five to eight minutes. It would increase the attraction of using trains rather than travelling by road if the cab rank could be duplicated—if there could be two lanes of it—or if at least the passengers queuing for the taxis and the taxis queuing for the passengers were not in contraflow so that, timidly, they marry up only one at a time, which results in very slow progress. I think that it is quite important that people who arrive by train and want to get a cab should be able to get one quickly. That is the whole point of getting a cab.

With that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as several of my colleagues are waiting to speak, I thank you and the House for hearing me and resume my seat.

12.43 pm

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): It is always a genuine pleasure to be called immediately after the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel). He is a unique Member of this place and I regard him as a rare and real treasure. I wanted to compliment two other speeches, but neither of the two Members who made them is in the Chamber. One was that of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). I always learn a great deal whenever she contributes to a debate of this nature. The other was that of the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), whom I especially wanted to congratulate. Had he spoken for one third of the time that he occupied, more of his hon. Friends would have had a hope of being called. Sadly, they are unlikely to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate, given the time that is available to us.

My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench, made an excellent contribution. I understand that it is his first outing as a shadow spokesman on transport. I look forward to hearing the full wit that my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) will bring to the debate when she replies on behalf of the Opposition. She is also someone whom I like to hear.

The hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), in the opening banter that warmed up the House earlier, referred to the fact that I was in my place—I assume that he was referring to me. I am in the Chamber to raise a serious matter about which I have already written to the Secretary of State. I accept, of course, that safety has already been mentioned by other hon. Members. Sadly, there have been some happenings in my constituency and on Merseyside generally that I believe have been affected by the change in ownership and administration of the railways, and I want to bring them to the attention of the House. I believe that there are things that the companies can do to deal with safety problems that they are not doing now.

Over the past 18 months, 17 children have been killed on the railway on Merseyside. Two others have been seriously injured. In three weeks this autumn there were four serious accidents in which three children were killed, the youngest being five years of age. Peter Mee, aged 16, and his 13-year-old friend climbed down from a railway bridge into coal trucks at Edge Hill in my constituency. Both boys were electrocuted by the overhead cables, and Peter was killed. His friend received 20 per cent. burns. Eight-year-old Anthony Gill was involved in an accident at Maghull when he and his friends were playing on the railway line. Anthony accidentally touched the third rail, the live rail, and was killed. Andrew Hall, aged only five, was killed in Birkenhead.

The three incidents to which I have referred happened within just a few days. They caused great shock to the community on Merseyside, including my constituents. In four weeks, four families were devastated. The impact on staff was also enormous. Five separate crews were sent home after the trauma that they experienced in trying to save Anthony's life after he had been electrocuted. Drivers are scarred for life after their trains have been responsible for the deaths of children or adults. I do not seek to suggest to the House that such incidents have never happened before, or that they are happening only because of privatisation, but we need to examine what has happened and see whether the companies set up to administer our railways have been helped to deal with safety issues.

Let us consider the response of the companies and take that in the context of the debate. One's immediate reaction—this would be true of anyone—is enormous sympathy for the parents and families involved. There is a real sense of shock that so many incidents could occur in such a short time. Questions follow on from that. How did the accidents happen? What investigations are taking place? Were the children aware of the dangers? How aware are people living near our railways of how increasingly dangerous they have become as speeds have increased and there has been an extended use of electricity to power our trains?

What can we do as a community to prevent more accidents happening? I appreciate that such incidents are becoming fewer over the years, but we must constantly review what is happening to ascertain whether we can do more.

Following the incident at Edge Hill, I met the regional director of Railtrack. I also met representatives of the local rail company, Merseyrail Electric, which operates the local services throughout Merseyside. I accept that there has been a thorough investigation on every occasion. I accept also that there is a genuine understanding of the problem on the part of those managing the services. They made no attempt to hide their shock and concern that young lives had been lost and families devastated. They have genuine concern also for their staff. They said that in some cases members of staff have been robbed of their health as a result of their experiences when an accident happens. They also expressed a real and genuine concern about the impact of the incidents on their passengers and on their ability to run the services. So there were commercial as well human reasons for them to deal with the problems and to ensure that their response to such incidents was as appropriate and thorough as possible. I invite the Minister to investigate the situation on Merseyside because of the frequency of the incidents.

The first matter that should be re-examined is the schools programme and the education programme with which British Rail has been involved for many years.

Formerly, the drivers who took part were drawn from a range of services, because there was no effective demarcation between the different services. Now, however, Merseyrail Electric has contracted to provide the service across Merseyside, and drivers and staff involved in the longer-haul trains—which have overhead cables rather than the third rail—are not involved in the service. That tranche of experience is therefore not available to schools, which appreciate the service that they receive from the railway workers who educate children about the dangers of playing on railway lines. That loss of expertise should be re-examined.

Staff concerned about reductions in the education service have passed to me a set of minutes. The representatives I met from both companies stressed the fact that they were committed to the service. Shortly after 14-year-old Stephen Judge was killed at Edge Hill last year, however, two debates occurred between local representatives of staff and their managers in Liverpool. On the first occasion—Monday 22 May 1995—the management minute stated:

"Staff side were concerned that these visits to local schools by a regular Driver had recently been stopped at a time when there had been two serious incidents involving young people coming into contact with Overhead Wires in the area.

Management Chairman stated that Railtrack . . . are now the custodian of these arrangements and that they therefore decide which schools will be visited and when.

Staff side noted but expressed their strong feelings about the withdrawal of these visits and hoped that safety was not being sacrificed for the sake of costs."

In July 1995, the concern was revisited. The minute states:

"The Staff Representatives wished to reiterate their concern regarding the withdrawal of these visits so far as Lime Street is concerned"—

the drivers who served my constituency and the Edge Hill area came from Lime Street—

"pointing out that Liverpool now have no Drivers carrying out these duties whereas Manchester has two, Chester one Driver still performing this important function."

I have talked to people at schools in my constituency, and they have stressed the value of the visits. There is a real need to review that service.

It is also worth noting the way in which one company would pass the buck of responsibility to another company. When I met managers, I did not detect a real attempt to duck responsibility, but in that type of routine meeting it becomes all too easy to say, "It is not our responsibility any more: we have noted what you said and you clearly have a legitimate concern, but it is the other company's responsibility now."

Local anxieties about the state of railway safety are such that the *Liverpool Echo* mounted a very successful campaign, the quality of which deserves congratulations. It produced posters with children to ensure that awareness is raised about the dangers of playing on railway lines. BBC Radio Merseyside should also be complimented for its work on the issue. The incidents have increased awareness in the area of the dangers, but the awareness may fade with time, as local media interest invariably moves on to more pressing issues. It is the responsibility of those administering the railways to ensure that on-going education is not reduced, but built on and increased.

It is worth considering the responses that the companies sent to Mr. Judge—the father of Stephen, who died last year. The British Railways Board and Railtrack responded to him in October last year, around the time of the inquest into Stephen's death. I refer particularly to Railtrack, which said that it was

"committed to stamping out injuries to young people. In this connection, a good deal of money has been spent on fencing the Edge Hill Depot and equipping it with electronic gates prior to this incident. Despite this, fences were deliberately damaged and vehicles positioned in the depot subjected to vandalism and fire.

It is difficult to know what more we can do to deter young people intent on gaining access to railway property and causing damage."

I got the same response when I met a Railtrack manager. He expressed genuine concern and anxiety and a wish that such things did not happen, but he did not know what could be done to stop determined young people getting on to the tracks. I genuinely feel that that attitude is not good enough. We have to check continually that we are doing enough.

On 14 December last year, Mr. Judge received another letter from the British Railways Board. It said:

"In addition to school liaison visits we have had poster and video campaigns."

Well done for that.

"We also work closely with both the British Transport and civil police forces in problem areas and have achieved some success in reducing trespass. But this sort of activity is"—

I am quoting directly—

"time consuming and diverts railway and police resources away from other duties."

Dealing with vandalism and trespass is not a diversion from the work of the transport police: it is an important element of it.

The local railway managers could reduce the opportunity for such incidents by extending the closed circuit television network. That would necessarily have to be backed up by increased support from the transport police and the civil police. I have visited the local command and control centre of Merseyrail Electric and was genuinely impressed by the work that has gone on there and the amount of money that has been invested in the system. There are 100 CCTV cameras on Merseyside, most of which are located around the stations. However, a lot of the vandalism and access to the tracks takes place slightly beyond the stations. Kids do not get on to the tracks at the station, but further down the line where nobody is watching and where there is a whole playground available. I am not suggesting that the whole network should be covered by CCTV, but it would be worth making a proper study of the value of the system so that we could cost it properly. The companies, in partnership, could then put in a bid to the Home Office for an extension of CCTV. Will the Minister comment on whether he thinks that such a project would be worth while and would be considered by the Government?

An extended CCTV network is of benefit only if the train drivers can communicate with central control quickly and easily. That is the final area in which I should like some investigation. It was pointed out to me that every train now has an in-cab radio telephone, but that does not impress the drivers I have met. I have other worries about the response of the companies to complaints from their staff about issues such as trespass. I have a memo dated 9 May 1996—just a few months ago—describing the

[Mrs. Jane Kennedy]

route between Broadgreen and Roby, which runs through the centre of my constituency. Under the heading, "Persons Affected", it says, "Train crew working route". The description of the incident is:

"No fencing, allowing access both sides of track by pedestrian walkway across under motorway (M6). Close on one dozen stone throwing incidents in last four months."

No effective action has been taken by the companies to deal with that.

The same drivers who drew that problem to my attention also said that when they met with stone throwing and incidents of vandalism or saw youngsters on the track, their ability to relay the information to central control was limited by the poor quality of the in-cab communications that they were using. That must be looked at carefully because there are some black spots. Those of us who use mobile telephones—being new Labour, of course I have a mobile telephone—appreciate that we sometimes hit black spots in our attempt to communicate. But for train drivers it must be possible to devise a reliable system of communication with a central control base so that local police or transport police can be alerted when children are seen on the railway line.

The Government have a responsibility to look at how the railway companies are responding to the tragedies that have occurred on Merseyside. The three measures that I have mentioned could help to improve safety. As I said at the outset, I realise that deaths and injuries occurred when the railways were directly run by the Government, and it is likely that they will occur in the future. Improvements made in rail safety, however, have largely been the product of better technology and better policing of the railways. The break-up of the railways administration has not helped in dealing with those matters. I am concerned that the different companies involved in administration may get tangled up, as there is no clear guidance as to who is responsible for doing the work necessary to make our railways safer.

I am grateful to the House for the opportunity to raise these matters, given that my normal role is to sit in silence.

1 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Further to the kind words of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) about my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel), I should like to say that, should the good voters of Broadgreen determine that the hon. Lady remains, I am sure that, after 27 years of service in the House, he will also regard her as a treasure.

I shall not speak for long as I know that many other hon. Members wish to speak. First, I shall clarify a point for the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), who raised a point of order when I spoke to someone in the Box. I was just carrying out common courtesy: I saw a friend to whom I was saying good morning. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would wish everyone in the House to be courteous, and I certainly intend to be so.

When I first came across the subject of rail privatisation, I heard warning voices wailing that it could not work and, like Labour Front-Bench Members, I wondered how it could work. However, I determined that the Government had a great deal of common sense and that many of those working for them had much more knowledge of the railway system than I do. I felt that British Rail had to improve. Since 1992-93, I have seen the service improve and I now speak with the zeal of a convert. I believe that the railway industry is now entering an exciting phase.

Let us look briefly at the history of British Rail. All hon. Members probably study Ordnance Survey maps from time to time and see disused railway lines covering the country. Most of them were closed in the 1960s and 1970s after the Beeching review. My constituency used to have 15 or 16 railway stations, all of which were closed, together with three whole lines: the central line and two others. Since then, only one station—Narborough—has been reopened. All the others remain closed, although there is a great deal of interest in reopening them. Leicestershire county council wishes to open the Ivanhoe line, which would run across to Derby, and I support the county council in that.

We must remember that British Rail's history is one of closure and decline. I pay tribute to the dedicated employees of British Rail, who worked to the best of their ability for a good railway system. Unfortunately, however, they failed to achieve that. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) mentioned Railfreight and spoke of his experience with freight companies trying to get freight on to rail. Three years ago, I spoke to a man who told me that he wanted to get freight on to railways, but when he went to British Rail, the manager would come up with a figure on which he could not possibly make a loss, and then double it, to be absolutely sure that there was not the slightest chance of making a loss. Of course, the figure was in no way competitive, so the customer went away and bought lorries instead.

About 12 years ago at new year, I went to Scotland. Many people go to Scotland for hogmanay; it is not a one-off, but happens every year. When I wanted to come back by rail, there had been some snow and, of course, the railways were disrupted by it—one accepted that—but it was extraordinary that, far from there being more trains because many more people would be travelling, when we eventually arrived at Glasgow, we found that every train was standing room only. After all, it was new year and a bank holiday, and who on earth would want to travel by train on a bank holiday apart from all the people going up to Scotland? Most expatriate Scots seem to go there for new year.

That, to me, was the history of British Rail: old dog-eared sandwiches, leaves on the track, inefficiency, late trains and restrictive practices. The future is exciting. On Midland MainLine, which I use quite often, the staff are becoming noticeably more polite. They must have had some training, because instead of saying, "I dunno," they say, "Well, sir, I'm not quite sure, but I'll go and find out." That is surely better for passengers and customers.

Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe (Leigh): New Labour.

Mr. Robathan: It is not new Labour at all; it is new railway lines.

My hon. Friend the Minister has already mentioned the "4Sight" fare. The biggest problem with the fare is that the public do not believe that it can be true. Midland MainLine will take a family of four from Sheffield to London and back for £29, and not on a train that runs at

2 o'clock in the morning and goes back at 3 o'clock in the morning, but on any train that can be booked. People do not take up the offer because they cannot believe it. One could not run a car on petrol from Sheffield to London for £29. At last, the railways are competing with the car on price, convenience and timings. That should be welcomed by everyone, and I pay tribute to Midland MainLine for it.

Midland MainLine also has a new, half-hourly weekday stopping service to Loughborough, and is upgrading security at car parks. Commuters who live three miles from a railway station and leave their car at a car park do not want to come back the next day and find that it has been broken into. At last, closed circuit television is being installed, because the company knows that if it can persuade people to take their car to the station, there will be more revenue from fares and the trains will not run half empty, as so many do at present.

The piggyback scheme on the west coast main line is extremely exciting; it will take lorries off the roads and put them on the trains. Mention has been made of Cross Country Trains and Virgin's possible involvement. We may think what we like of Richard Branson's style, but he is an exciting and entrepreneurial business man who has done incredibly well, and if he can see merit in taking up the Cross Country Trains franchise, that suggests that we could do a lot better with the railway lines than we did under the dead hand of state bureaucracy and nationalised industry. People want to invest in the railways, because they know that they are the future.

The railways used to be a bastion of restrictive practices. Dear old Jimmy Knapp, about whom we have heard already, took out newspaper advertisements in 1986 when there was a dispute about guards, asking people who thought that guards should be kept on trains to write to him. I wrote to him—perhaps I should mention that at the time I was not even a member of the Conservative party—because I, too, wanted security and guards on trains.

I had just been to Ashford in Kent, and I wanted to get a table for the rickety old carriage in which I was travelling, so I went to speak to the guard. When I found him, he had his feet up and was reading the *Beano*. He did not say, "Yes, sir, can I help you?"; he said, "Back carriage," and that was it. That was how useful having a guard was. Jimmy Knapp was wrong then, and he is wrong now. He has always been wrong; he is a trade union dinosaur. That he should oppose rail privatisation shows that we must be right.

I wish to raise a note of caution with my hon. Friend the Minister about the sale of railway assets. I understand from my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) that we have safeguarded them, but I am worried that if the railways grow—as I believe that they will—and some assets and sidings are sold off prematurely, they will not have the opportunity to grow in the way that we would wish. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will pay attention to that.

I am chairman of the all-party cycling group. I am sure that Opposition Members are also cyclists. Not all cyclists are Conservatives, but they should be because of what privatisation is doing for cycling opportunities on the railways. It is not only Great Western but Anglia Railways that are examining changing their rolling stock so that cycles can once again be taken on trains. British Rail did away with all the useless old guards vans so that people could not take along their bicycles. Cyclists who want to travel to railway station A to get to B and then cycle to C have to take their bicycles. Now they will again be able to because the railways are considering the customer—the passenger—and how they can serve the customer-passenger to maximise efficiency and revenue.

The environmental benefits of rail travel are self-evident. I walked here today and I am sure that all Opposition Members used a bicycle or public transport or walked. More seriously, we must accept that the likelihood of major road building schemes is becoming increasingly slim because of the understandable resistance of our constituents, which I share. We do not have the space for new roads. All hon. Members must have motorways and dual carriageways that harm, and often ruin, the lives of their constituents.

If we are not to have new roads, we must consider how to get more people on to public transport. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad to hear that support from the Opposition. Rail privatisation gives us a chance to achieve that object. Last weekend, I was speaking to a banker who was working in New York. I am sure that he is a Conservative, although he did not say so. I was amazed when he said that he was looking forward to coming back to England and using the railways. He said that the roads were hopeless now. We all know that they are congested. I use the M1, which is always blocked on a Friday. I am going to Norfolk later today.

Mr. Churchill: What about the M6?

Mr. Robathan: It will be blocked as well. It is blocked because of prosperity. Under the Conservative Government, people have too many cars. We want people to get out of their cars and on to the railways. Schemes such as "4Sight" will do that.

My banker friend said that the future is railways. People will travel by rail. He works in America and can see that. People who cannot travel by car will use something that will get them there on time. That did not happen under British Rail. I firmly believe that it will under the privatised railways. I can say with the zeal of a convert that rail privatisation has brought a new era to the railways, which now have a future instead of the endless decline of the past 50 years.

1.12 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I accept the explanation offered by the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) for why he communicated with civil servants in the Box. If he was saying, "Good morning," I have no objection, but more than one Conservative Member was involved and there was quite a banter with the civil servants, who were perhaps being partial when cheering on the Minister when he replied to Opposition interventions. I thought that it was all slightly unseemly, but we have settled down after the first half hour and are having a reasonably instructive debate from which I hope both Government and Opposition can learn.

I must tell the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) that I doubt whether the Minister will deal personally with changes to a waiting room in one of the stations in his constituency. The hon. Gentleman said that he did not want to be a citizen and would prefer to be a subject. If he had "subject" on his passport, he would be interrogated on arrival at terminal 2 or 3 and sent back as an illegal immigrant.

[Dr. John Marek]

The hon. Member for Twickenham also accused me of being unfair to the civil servants in the Box by calling them scribblers, but they were scribbling notes. It is a perfectly respectable term, and no disrespect was meant by the description. Such work continues to be done, and it is an important asset to Ministers who need advice and accurate information to help them reply to the points made by hon. Members.

Many Conservative Members have attacked British Rail today. They talked about Beeching, but none has said that a Conservative Government appointed Beeching and that Conservative Governments are to blame for the massive closures that took place in the early 1960s. I remember the Labour Government who took power in 1964. They appointed Lady Castle as Minister of Transport. She was unable to reverse many of the changes that had been made. I draw a parallel between 1964 and what is going on now. There is a rush to try to franchise and sell off the system, and it does not appear to matter what price the Government get. They want to sell as much as possible before the next Labour Government take office on 2 May.

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Gentleman is right in that Beeching brought out his report in 1962, under a Conservative Government, but it was generally thought that the motor car would take over—as it perhaps has done during the past few years. From October 1964 onwards—two years after the report was published—the Labour Government implemented the closures. He says that the Minister of Transport at the time was unable to stop the closures, but she could have if she had tried harder.

Dr. Marek: Nothing is ever totally black or white—although in this case it is mostly black as far as Conservative Members are concerned.

I wish to comment on the attack on Jimmy Knapp by the hon. Member for Blaby. Jimmy Knapp is an elected trade unionist who is representing his members and fighting, against all the odds, to ensure that his members continue to get a reasonable salary on which to live. Many Conservative Members—I am not accusing the hon. Gentleman of this—would be happy if rail workers continued to do the same job on half the salary. That must be stopped, and I am glad that the European Union has now made sure that public sector workers at least will benefit from the 48-hour directive.

The debate got off to a bad start when the Minister for Railways and Roads accused many Opposition Members of being paid mouthpieces of the rail workers or the unions. In the past, I was sponsored by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers. Conservative Members who look at the Register of Members' Interests will see that I have declared that 25 per cent. of my election expenses were paid for by the RMT. On the other hand, nobody from the RMT has paid me a penny—*[Interruption.]* The Minister may look up at the ceiling, but I have not received a penny from the RMT to put in my pocket as salary, or as any expense or benefit—not one penny. It is Conservative Members who take £1,000 for asking parliamentary questions, not Labour Members.

It is a pity that the Minister for Railways and Roads is not here. Having made a bad start to the debate, he made his speech and hardly listened to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley). He then disappeared, and has not been seen since. However, I absolve his deputy, the Minister for Transport in London, who has been here throughout the debate, and whom I commend for listening to it all. That is not always the case; he has listened, and I am sure that we will get a good winding-up speech as a result.

I will refer to the problems of privatisation in a moment, but whether the system can be renationalised has been mentioned. I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe—

Mr. Bradley: Withington.

Dr. Marek: I am sorry. I live only 50 miles from Manchester, and I should know better. My hon. Friend the Member for Withington said that, under the next Labour Government, Railtrack would be publicly owned and publicly accountable. Those were excellent words. We need that for the establishment of an integrated system. I shall give examples in due course.

One way of doing that would be to insist that Railtrack lowers access charges to franchisees. In that case, Railtrack would need public subsidy. None of the Conservative Members who have spoken mentioned the fact that an enormous amount of public subsidy still goes into the railway system. If track access charges were reduced and Railtrack received public subsidy, equity could be taken in return. I imagine that Railtrack could be nationalised within a couple of years—with no trouble. If that public subsidy was not available, the entire system would stop—not tomorrow, but in 20 minutes. We must be clear that an important public interest is involved and that it must be maintained.

I do not argue that everything that Conservative Members have said is wrong. Of course there are advantages in allowing private individuals to exercise their entrepreneurship in operating services or parts of services. Some of that has been done reasonably well. By and large, though, it has been froth—some of it important froth—and the real problem facing the railway system now in its semi-privatised state is the lack of finance, investment, traction, rolling stock and proper facilities at stations.

Nothing will change that unless the method of financing is reassessed and the Government make a serious attempt to move passengers and freight on to the railways. I do not have the figures, but well over 90 per cent. of freight is carried by road—let us say 94 per cent. If the amount of freight carried on the railway was doubled, 88 per cent. would still be carried by road. The problem is huge. I am not confident that the next Labour Administration will be up to the task. It requires a Government with the will and the powers to tackle the whole unhappy situation.

I hope that, if the hon. Member for Blaby is going to Norfolk, he will go by train. It is Friday, so the roads will be blocked.

Mr. Robathan: I walked here.

Dr. Marek: I walked here as well. There is clearly much to be gained by Members of Parliament travelling from their constituencies by train or other forms of public transport—or, preferably, by foot, if that is possible.

I have listened to the points made by other hon. Members. I welcome the fact that mobile telephones and walkmans have been banned from some railway carriages. Check-in facilities on the Gatwick Express will be helpful to the average passenger. I have no argument with such developments.

I regret, however, the loss of integration in services—for example, in pricing. It should be simple for a passenger arriving from my part of the world, north Wales, to turn up at Victoria and get the next train to Gatwick, whether it is the Gatwick Express, a stopping train that goes as far as Three Bridges or a Brighton express. We cannot do that now. By getting on the wrong train, people face penalty payments. Competition has led to differences in ticket prices. I do not oppose competition—it has some merit—but too much competition leads to a loss of integration and traveller convenience. Passengers who buy rail tickets should be able to travel from one part of the country to another with as few restrictions as possible.

Delays in the London area have increased. A friend who lives in Lee, south-east London, has used the line from Lee to Charing Cross for more than 30 years. I remember using the line from New Cross Gate to Charing Cross when I was a student 30 years ago and I do not recall many delays on the trains to London Bridge—although there were difficulties at Borough Market junction, which probably still occur. My friend told me only yesterday that trains are often delayed by five, 10 or 15 minutes before they reach London Bridge station. That is only anecdotal evidence but it is provided by someone who has used the service for 30 years and I think that we should take it seriously. It stands in stark contrast to the claims of many Conservative Members.

There are other problems. Some 20 or 30 years ago, trains on north Kent lines used to have four seats across—two on each side with a corridor down the middle. The much vaunted Networkers—which are still experiencing problems—have five seats across. I travelled on a Networker train some time ago and I could not sit in the seat because the pitch was too tight. There was a small well in the back of the seat in front of me and, if I was careful, I could slot my knees into it, but it was an uncomfortable journey.

I think that trains carrying passengers five abreast on the British gauge are not suitable for journeys of up to one hour and 40 minutes, for example, as from Victoria to Ramsgate. I do not doubt that rail passengers can stand for journeys of 20 minutes or sit in cattle-like conditions for 30 or 40 minutes, but why do we build down to a standard with every new generation of trains? That does not always happen, but it is what we have done with the South Eastern electrics. I do not applaud the new developments in trains. We must lift our horizons. It remains to be seen whether the investment in South West Trains and elsewhere to which Conservative Members referred will provide better standard, more comfortable trains. I suspend judgment until I see what happens.

I apologise to hon. Members from other parts of the country, but I shall now restrict my remarks to the Wrexham area in my constituency and illustrate how privatisation has affected local services. First, I refer to the west coast and north Wales main lines. Until 1991, six trains travelled from Euston to Holyhead each day. Privatisation plans were being drawn up at that time and the Government were preparing for the 1992 election. They clearly asked civil servants to consider how to privatise the railways. As a consequence, there was a general change in British Rail's attitude to developing its services and passenger facilities.

The service in the Wrexham area began to go downhill after 1992, and there has been no improvement since privatisation and the introduction of franchising. The six InterCity trains that used to travel from Euston to Holyhead were powered electrically as far as Crewe, where there was an engine change, and then continued to Holyhead.

At that time, it was deemed that class 47s would be life expired after a certain time and that certain changes would have to be made. After much debate, it was decided to run diesel under the wires between Crewe and Euston and to have high-speed trains on the service. However, only three services in each direction were operated. It is getting worse. Last year, those three services came down to about two and a half, because the last train from Euston to Holyhead, at about 20.05 or 20.10, is no longer an HST. It is electrically hauled as far as Crewe, where the engine is changed and then some old engine—probably some class 37—is found and it is hauled by diesel from Crewe to Holyhead.

Why? Because under the old British Rail there was integration, and HSTs were maintained at Plymouth—there was a depot at Old Oak. Since the system was split up, the west coast main line has had three sets for use on the Holyhead service. Those sets cannot, however, be maintained in the integrated fashion that they once were, with the result that they have to go to Manchester for servicing, and it is simply not possible for the sets, in rotation, to be maintained in Manchester properly and efficiently, keeping the three services in each direction HST hauled all the way. That is an excellent example of where privatisation has worsened the service for the ordinary passenger. We now have a service that takes longer, that grumbles through the Welsh countryside after it reaches Wales from Chester to Holyhead, and there is a delay at Crewe. There has been a worsening of the conditions and the service.

Worse is to come. The franchising director's draft minimum passenger service requirement for the service stipulates not that three trains should be run each day in each direction, but only two. Why is the minimum PSR for north Wales going to be worse? I suspect that it is simply because there is no money in that service. There is money in services between London and Manchester, but I am not sure that there is in services between London and Liverpool. There is money on the east coast main line, but most of the rail network does not provide money, with the result that services will be provided at the lowest common denominator, with very little being added, because most of the franchise operators will depend on subsidy to be able to please their shareholders. If they are to depend on subsidy to please their shareholders, they will want to spend as little of their subsidy as possible and provide as few services as possible.

I suspect that the franchise operator, who I know has been told by the Government to speed everything up and flog it all off before the next general election, never mind how it is done, has no choice but to accept the dictates of the Government. I regularly notice on the north Wales main line that the maintenance of the HST sets is not as good as it was. They are in bad condition. Often, there are only seven carriages in a set, when there should be

[Dr. Marek]

eight. The reason, of course, is that one of the carriages has had to be taken out because it has not been fit for use. The restaurant car on the last train from Euston has disappeared. It is not possible to get a meal or any refreshment on that train. That line is run down because there is no money in it for the private operator, and the present management—the line is not quite franchised, but they are there to try to get the contract—will go down to the lowest common denominator to provide the service.

It would be useful if the Minister could place in the Library a list of the times during the past six months when the Euston to Holyhead trains were held up or more than 10 minutes late arriving at Holyhead or Euston. The list would be long, and it would show that passengers and the public in north Wales are dissatisfied with the standard of passenger services on the west coast main line.

Wrexham had two-hourly services, which were increased to hourly services until 1991, following pressure from Members of Parliament and others. After that, they were reduced to two-hourly services, and the gap between trains from Wrexham to Chester is now sometimes more than two hours. Privatisation has been detrimental to my constituents. I shall be interested to know whether the Minister has a solution to the problem we face in Wrexham.

If people wish to travel from Wrexham to London, they have two ways of doing it. They can either take a Sprinter to Wolverhampton and Birmingham and take the InterCity service to Euston, or take a Sprinter 12 miles to Chester, where they can take the west coast main line InterCity service and travel in reasonable comfort to Euston—although it is a bone-shaking journey, and has got so bad that it is impossible to read, let alone write.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones *rose—*

Dr. Marek: I shall not give way as I have an important matter to raise.

The journey via Birmingham takes roughly four hours. It can take as little as two hours 46 minutes via Chester—it was timetabled to take two hours 46 minutes in the summer of 1993. The Wrexham to Chester section is run by the regional railway company, Centro. It is not in its interest, as a sector operator, to provide good connections at Chester for passengers who are travelling only 12 miles from Wrexham to Chester and transferring their patronage to another company. Centro would far rather that passengers travel from Wrexham in a grotty Sprinter all the way to the midlands—so that the company can secure more revenue—and change to InterCity.

The only solution to that problem is for the franchising director to specify detailed conditions for connections at Chester. In the draft minimum passenger requirement, no such conditions were specified. The franchising director tells me that he will consider doing that, but I do not think that they will be sufficient. At present, when a passenger travels from Wrexham to London via Chester, the train from Wrexham to Chester arrives about 10 minutes before the train from Chester to Crewe and Euston. However, on the way back to Wrexham from London, the passenger arrives at Chester but the connecting train to Wrexham has left 10 minutes before, so he has to wait one hour 50 minutes.

Wrexham is quite a large place—it has a population of 120,000—but if one finds a connecting train there it is by sheer good fortune, not because of the system. My contention is that privatisation does not help integration or provide good passenger connections.

Railtrack, a privatised company, is supposedly dedicated to the provision of good transport facilities and good passenger connections. It proposes to close Wrexham Central station because it wants to develop the site and make a killing with a grotty development company called Trinity Investments Ltd. It wants to put up some retail sheds and flog them under a commercial lease, make a killing and then disappear.

My respect for Railtrack has been lowered because it has been taken in by this development scheme. There is a proposal before the rail users consultative committee that the station should be closed, that 350 yd of track should be taken up and that a new station should be built about 350 yd further away from the town centre. That means that my constituents will have to walk 700 yd each time they want to commute to the town centre or go shopping there.

The Labour council is supporting the scheme. It is beyond belief that such a council should support the first instance under the privatised regime of Railtrack trying to close railways to make a development killing to benefit its shareholders. The old council granted planning permission, and I suppose that it had an excuse in that it acted in a quasi-judicial capacity. I hope that the new council will object to the scheme, which would rip off the taxpayer and considerably inconvenience my constituents.

Railtrack representatives were in evidence at last year's Labour party conference. It did not have the franchise at that time, and I had a conversation with the chief executive, who said that he would not pursue any specific line or make any irrevocable decisions without letting me know. No knowledge of what he was about to do has been provided. It is regrettable that Railtrack representatives were not at this year's party conference in Blackpool. There was no reason for them to be there but, of course, they now hold a franchise and Members of Parliament can go to hell—it does not matter if passengers are inconvenienced or have arthritis or are disabled; under British company law, the only people who count are the shareholders. There is no advantage in privatisation.

The closure of Wrexham Central station is a major matter and will be the first closure of its kind. Would my hon. Friend the Member for Withington and the Minister care to visit Wrexham and be my guest for an hour so that I may show them the exact situation? I should be grateful if they could accept my invitation. Unless we get it right and insist on Railtrack promoting first the interests of the passenger and not those of the shareholder, whatever the changes—I think that they are wrong—the net result will be that the public will have an even worse railway system than they have at present.

I hope that these matters are taken seriously. I look forward to the general election because I am confident that the Conservatives will be out of office and that we shall have a better Government who have the real interests of the travelling public at heart.

1.43 pm

Mr. Winston Churchill (Davyhulme): It is a matter of great regret that the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) has such a love affair with the sound of his own voice that he rabbited on for some 32 minutes and crowded out two of my hon. Friends.

In opening the debate, the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) told us that it is not the intention of new Labour to renationalise the rail industry. Why on earth not? Has it no longer the courage of its convictions? Or has it belatedly come to the realisation that state control is a disaster? If the latter, why is the Labour party committing itself to taking back political control of the rail industry, into the hands of the Secretary of State? I for one have no hesitation in saying that whatever the state can do, private enterprise can do better, cheaper and more efficiently. I have never accepted the socialist view, so brazenly articulated by the late Douglas Jay, that

"the man in Whitehall knows best".

Although many Opposition Members still cling to that nostrum, it is patently bunk to imagine that politicians and bureaucrats in Whitehall have any concept of how to run a railway, let alone any other nationalised industry.

The state ownership of the railways has been a disaster. For the most part, the trains were old, dirty, overcrowded and unpunctual. The service provided to the travelling public was a scandal and much of the investment was misplaced. In the case of the east coat main line, £515 million was sunk into electrification and the re-equipment of the line. Do electric trains run faster than the diesel HS125s? No, the answer is that they do not, because the overhead power lines will not deliver enough steady power to allow higher speeds, and the signalling system is inadequate. Are electric trains any cheaper to run? Again, the answer is no. Electricity and maintenance of the overhead cables cost more than the diesel fuel, and the electric locomotives are less reliable than the diesel ones. It is the electric locomotives that do not work when the wrong kind of snow is falling. The electrification of the east coast main line was a purely political decision and the resources would have been far better spent on new rolling stock and signalling equipment.

The only worry that I have about rail privatisation is why it has taken a Tory Government 17 years, and £16 billion in the process, to privatise that disaster area of the nationalised industries. The total absence of any financial imperative under the nationalised regime led to an appalling state of affairs on the railways. What but a nationalised undertaking would do all its maintenance between 9 am and 5 pm, the very time when the maximum number of train sets were needed to carry passengers, and for the all too simple reason that that was a more convenient time for its staff?

Time and again, the staff came before the interests of the travelling public. When managers of the east coast main line were asked why the trains were so dirty and whether they did not have a train-washing machine, they replied that they had one such machine, but that it did not work very well in the winter months. The managers were asked why they did not employ gangs overnight to clean the trains when they were in the terminals. They replied that they had thought of that, but they could not do that because of the power in the overhead cables. Nobody had the wit to pick up a telephone to ask the person who controlled the electricity to switch it off for two or three hours while people were cleaning the trains at the main terminals.

A major scandal is that the greater part of British Rail's state-of-the-art signalling system makes no provision for efficient, direct voice contact between the signal box and the driver's cab. We are back to the days of Thomas the tank engine. If the driver wishes to speak to the fat controller—and the amiable figure of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) comes to mind—he has to stop the train at a signal, dismount and go to a box on the signal tower to use the telephone.

At many major terminals such as King's Cross, Railtrack refuses to limit access to the station at night

"because the Post Office would complain".

As a result, passengers must run the gauntlet of muggers, tramps sleeping rough, drug dealers and even physical attack. That is outrageous and I trust that the Minister will take it up with Railtrack and require it to take prompt action.

Another scandal for too long has been the treatment of disabled passengers in wheelchairs, who, under nationalised railways, except on InterCity trains, were consigned to the guards van, which was unheated and had no facilities. The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East has said that the only benefit from rail privatisation would be a new livery. That is already being disproved. The travelling public already enjoy cleaner trains, faster journey times and greater reliability of service.

The industry is being transformed, but it is important, if it is to realise its full potential, that the obstacles to large-scale investment be removed. The principal obstacle remains the Treasury. It is important that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer deal with that problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) identified the dead hand of the Treasury as being the principal brake on rail investment in the past. Tragically, it remains so. The privatised rail network is having its investment constrained by the Treasury—not directly of course, but indirectly—by a refusal to grant franchises beyond seven to 15 years. Indeed, in most cases, the period is restricted to seven years. Within that brief time span, it is impossible to amortise new buildings and rolling stock. That acts as a supreme disincentive to the large-scale investment that would otherwise be made.

Either the franchises must be extended to 35 years or arrangements must be made to give the operator a guarantee that he will be able to sell to a successor the unamortised portion of his investment, if the operator's franchise is not renewed. I trust that my hon. Friend the Minister with deal urgently with the matter. It is the one remaining obstacle to making an enormous success of the railways, and it is urgent that it be removed.

It is evident that the Labour Opposition have still not been able to turn their back finally on the idea that commercial entities such as the railways would be better run if they were brought back within political control. If they are pledged to do that with the railways, why not with buses, airlines and all other previously nationalised

[Mr. Winston Churchill]

industries? New Labour is a party that is suffering from acute schizophrenia, putting itself through all sorts of uncomfortable contortions to make itself electable. It is not comfortable in its new non-socialist clothes and, in consequence, its policies are a shambles, nowhere more so than in its attitude to a privatised rail network. It is clear that it needs to lose a few more elections before it is fit to govern Britain.

1.53 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): It is surely a shame that the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), who bears a name that reverberates in a parliamentary sense in this place and throughout the world, chose to open his remarks with an insulting definition of the contribution made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), who could speak well for 32 hours, and who has no small experience and intelligence. My hon. Friend spoke specifically and concisely about his constituents' interests and how those interests have been damaged by the Government's rail privatisation policy.

My hon. Friend also spoke of the bad humour with which the debate began. Indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker referred to that ill humour. It began with the Minister of State berating the Labour party for failing to call a debate on rail privatisation since the spring, ignoring the fact that this is the first time for three years that the Government have chosen to call a debate on rail privatisation.

The Minister of State then went on, as regrettably did other Conservative Members, to be somewhat abusive about trade unions, and especially those in the railway industry. He clearly was unaware of the advertisement that had been published by the Conservative and Unionist party in *The Guardian* on Friday 27 September 1996, headed:

"If Labour don't want you, we do."

The advertisement says:

"We will not claim to put your interests above all others. But we pledge not to put any interests above yours. The Conservative Party is for all. We will not abandon you."

Clearly, the Conservative and Unionist party is interested in the votes and membership fees of trade union members, but if the idea that a member of a trade union should be part of a board, where he can bring to bear his commitment to the rail industry and many years of experience, is presented to the Government, they find that quite different.

The Minister raised again the tired old hare of Labour Members speaking only as mouthpieces for trade unions. I explained the position, and my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham went into some detail, defining for Conservative Members the situation between trade unionists and the Labour party. Regrettably, the Minister did not inform the House of his interest, which is in the Register of Members' Interests, as the parliamentary adviser to British Bus plc. As we know, there are many rail franchise operators who also operate buses. To add insult to injury, the Minister is no longer in his place. I trust that his colleagues will ensure that he reads my remarks in the official record.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Does my hon. Friend recall that the Minister referred to the number of Tory Members in the Chamber compared to Opposition Members? Has my hon. Friend noticed that there are more than twice the number of Opposition Members in their places than Conservative Members, thereby showing where the true long-term interests of the railway lie within the House?

Ms Jackson: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. Even more importantly, the British people know where the real, true interest and commitment to a properly integrated railway system is, and that is certainly not to be found among those on the Conservative Benches.

Mr. Bowis: Will the hon. Lady confirm that the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) was passed a note by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, explaining that he had to leave the House to speak at a conference and offering his apologies to those who sit on the Opposition Front Bench? Will she also confirm that there is no reference to a paid consultancy in respect of my hon. Friend the Minister of State in the Register of Members' Interests? Indeed, to have such a consultancy would be entirely in breach of the rules for Ministers. Will she please withdraw that allegation?

Ms Jackson: I am prepared to acknowledge both of the Minister's remarks, but that in no wise removes my initial statement that the Minister began the debate with no small ill humour. Possibly that could be because he had come to realise that he is a Minister in a Government who have fewer than six months before a general election and are facing the imminent prospect of becoming a minority Administration. He realised that a morning spent in the House attempting to defend rail privatisation would not necessarily be the wisest use of his time. That was obviously clear to the Secretary of State for Transport, who has not attended the debate—clearly, he is a man who knows a vulnerable parliamentary majority and a deeply unpopular policy when he sees them. In the best tradition of the officer classes, he allowed his men to storm over the top alone.

I pay tribute to Conservative Members who attempted to defend the shambles that is privatisation. First, there was the issue of services or, as Conservative Members claim, improved services, post-privatisation.

The hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) mentioned the midland main line and the west coast main line, and painted a picture of a glowing future for the latter under privatisation. That confidence is undermined, however, by the fact that he has leapt on to the chicken run and moved himself away from the north-west. He also mentioned the contribution made by National Express—the same National Express that, in June, received a warning from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry that it would be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission unless it removed point-to-point coach services from London to Derby, Chesterfield, Leicester, Sheffield and Nottingham. It is also the same National Express that recently placed a series of advertisements urging passengers to take coaches rather than the train to the Phoenix and Reading rock festivals.

I should say, to be fair to him, that the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) was generous in his acknowledgement of the commitment made by many railway employees. He also—although he was not alone—described BR as incompetent, from beginning to

end, in its stewardship of our railways. However, services offered by BR, such as InterCity, have been copied around the world. BR took InterCity into profit in 1988, and, between 1975 and 1995, it opened or reopened 242 stations and 25 lines for passenger services.

BR had an established international standing. It was generally acknowledged to be one of the most efficient railways in Europe, and it was the least subsidised. Support from public funds, as a proportion of gross domestic product, was 0.18 per cent. in Britain, compared with an average of 0.59 per cent. for other European railways.

The hon. Member for Blaby also referred to improvements on our railways for cyclists—a move that everyone will welcome. Bicycles were also mentioned by the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), but in relation to Great Western. What he failed to mention was that the Government's preferred bidder for the GWR franchise was not the management buy-out team, which consisted entirely of former BR employees, but a company called Resurgent Railways, which was run by a failed double-glazing salesman and a vice-chairman of the Huntingdon Conservative association. The only reason why Resurgent Railways is not running the service is that my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) walked round to Companies House and exposed its record.

Conservative Members also mentioned South East Trains, which, as has been well publicised, is a subsidiary of Compagnie Générale des Eaux, the French multinational. CGE is the organisation that recently saw its president charged with corruption and 20 executives of one of its main subsidiaries arrested on bribery charges. It was also described by a French judge as one of the two most corrupt companies in France. That prompted my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North to suggest that the Government were probably desperately trying to track down the second most corrupt company. The fact that the Government regard fraud and bribery as indicative of managerial competence and suitability says almost as much about the Government as it does about the entire, shabby privatisation process.

Hon. Members from both sides of the House could sit here all day and swap anecdotes about services that have improved or services that have declined. Many of us have direct personal experience of the latter. Surely, however, the real test of the changes that privatisation is making to our network is how they are perceived and received by the passengers who are using them. In his excellent speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) mentioned the Central Rail Users Consultative Committee's annual report. The committee is a statutory body, established by the Government, with the responsibility of representing the views of rail users. Its annual report refers to the rise and rise in complaints—complaints about punctuality; complaints about overcrowding; complaints about the on-train environment and facilities.

Mr. Robathan: It has been brought to my attention that some opponents of privatisation—including the Labour party, it has been suggested—have encouraged people to write complaining about the railways just so that they can point to a growth in the number of complaints. Will the hon. Lady deny that the Labour party has encouraged anybody to complain about the new railway system?

Ms Jackson: In denying what the hon. Member for Blaby has said, I have to ask whether there are any depths to which the Conservatives are not prepared to run in their contempt for the British electorate. Does he seriously expect hon. Members to believe that the British people, who already work far longer hours than others—those who are fortunate enough to have a job under this Government—would spend valuable spare time writing with complaints about events that they had not directly experienced? That is bizarre. It is little wonder that the country is crying out for a change of Government. That was the passengers' verdict on rail privatisation—a 14 per cent. jump in complaints in just 12 months. The figures are hardly a ringing endorsement of rail privatisation. They are, however, evidence of the failure of the Government's policies.

We have heard from the Minister of the service improvements promised under privatisation. I should be interested to know the Minister's response to Mr. Eric Midwinter, chairman of the London regional passenger committee, who said of his committee's investigations:

> "In only one case . . . has it been able to identify a real service improvement in any of the public service requirements it has considered, and then only in respect of one train."

I am sure that the users of that service welcome any improvements, but the destruction of the entire national rail network purely to guarantee the provision of one rail service seems over-dramatic and drastic even by the Government's standards.

Mr. Bowis: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Jackson: This must be the last time.

Mr. Bowis: It will be. Mr. Midwinter has not been the chairman of that committee for some time. Can the hon. Lady tell the House how many months privatisation had been running when that former chairman may have made that remark?

Ms Jackson: It would seem that all the Government's promises are dependent on an ever-lengthening time scale. That is not what we were told when they introduced rail privatisation. We were told that there would be an immediate, recognisable, provable improvement in services throughout the network.

Anyone wanting a true flavour of what privatisation holds in store for the quality of rail services should read the comments of Mr. John Seymour, published in *The Independent* on 5 February 1996. Mr. Seymour had the historic distinction of being the first passenger to be carried by a private rail service in this country. He was on the 1.50 am Fishguard to Paddington service. It was a bus and it was late. Said Mr. Seymour:

> "We weren't given any information at the station at all. Nobody seemed to know why there was no train. Everything from privatisation, work on the line and an accident were put forward as excuses. Next time I come I'm going to fly."

That is the Government's definition of success: soaring complaints from disgruntled passengers who justifiably regard privatisation as a failure. They know that it is a

[Ms Jackson]

failure not just because they are paying the price in poorer service quality. Ministers have referred to the magical fare cap, which, they have boasted in the past, will keep fares pegged to inflation. I remind them of the comments of the right hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), who boldly stated last May:

"Under nationalisation, passengers have regularly had to pay fare increases above the rate of inflation. This is to change . . . Now passengers can enjoy a period of stability and then a real fall in many rail fares."

In November, the Minister for Railways and Roads, who should be present but who, I gather, has a previous engagement, admitted to me in a parliamentary answer that as few as 47 per cent. of commuter rail fares and 21 per cent. of inter-city fares would be capped. In January, fares rose by as much as 8 per cent.—more than double the current inflation rate.

It was a particularly embarrassing incident for Ministers when they had to explain to one of their senior colleagues, the Secretary of State for Social Security, why travellers from his St. Albans constituency, having been pledged a cut in fares, turned up at the station to find that the somewhat ironically titled "cheap day return" had risen by double the rate of inflation. It was even more embarrassing for them when they had to explain to the Secretary of State for Transport why fares from his Ealing constituency had risen by a similar amount. It must have been positively nightmarish for the hon. Member for Slough (Mr. Watts) when he had to explain to himself why he had pledged to peg fares and had then raised fares in his constituency by more than 30 per cent. above inflation.

In all seriousness, is it any wonder that the public are so disenchanted with the Government and this privatisation when a pledge made in May is so comprehensively broken fewer than six months later? We know that privatisation was supposed to improve services, and that has failed. We know that it was supposed to hold down fares; it has failed there also.

A third great pledge—that privatisation would secure massive amounts of private investment—was alluded to by the Minister. Let us take that supposed new investment piece by piece. First, we are experiencing the longest drought in new rolling stock manufacture since British Rail was nationalised in 1948. The historic railway manufacturing works at York have closed for good, with the loss of hundreds of jobs also at Derby. Thousands of commuters continue to travel on rolling stock that is up to 30 years old, crowded and uncomfortable. As the report into the recent Watford rail crash will prove—if Railtrack has the courage to publish it rather than see it distributed through a series of selective leaks—the rolling stock is also dangerous in the event of collision.

My hon. Friends the Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) and the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) spoke about the possible deterioration of safety in what used to be an integrated network. Those are extremely serious concerns, yet there would seem to be nothing that the Government either wish to do or can do about it. Indeed, so bad has the drought in rolling stock become that in March, a regional railway, South Wales and West, approached the Steam Town train museum in north Lancashire to ask if it could hire some of its 40-year-old exhibits because, said a spokesman for the company,

"we needed extra coaches and these carriages offer better value."

I trust that the Minister for Transport in London, who is no doubt preparing to regale us with tales of franchise contracts and commitments to new train orders, will answer some simple questions. First, in the past year, before it handed over ownership of rolling stock to the three ROSCOs, British Rail had more than 1,600 locomotives and 10,000 coaches. How many new units are currently on the ROSCOs' order books—not planned or proposed as part of a franchise agreement, but currently on the order books? Secondly, the Minister talked of extended franchises, with rolling stock clauses contained in franchise agreements. My understanding, however, is that in most, if not all, of those cases, franchises are of the conventional length of approximately seven years with an option for franchisees to extend the franchise once new rolling stock is ordered.

If a franchisee comes to the Minister after two or three years and says that it cannot afford the new rolling stock after all, what sanctions will be available? Will the franchise be revoked? Will the franchisee be prevented from bidding for an extension of the franchise once it has expired? Will there be any financial penalties? If not, that will underline how privatisation is failing to deliver any new investment in rolling stock and is delivering merely paper pledges that will be ripped up the second that the army of accountants now running our rail network casts a negative eye over the balance sheets.

It is the same story with the Minister's grandiose statements about investment in infrastructure. Railtrack's network management statement announces investment of £10 billion over the next 10 years, amounting to an annual investment programme of £1 billion. The Prime Minister leapt on that statement in the House, claiming that such a high level of investment would not occur in the public sector. Unfortunately, he had not bothered to check his figures or facts; if he had, he would have known that in 1992-93, the last year before the Government embarked on their great privatisation experiment, British Rail invested £1.35 billion on infrastructure alone—£35 million more than we have been promised by Mr. Horton and his colleagues.

Since 1948, total average investment by the publicly owned British Rail has exceeded £1.2 billion a year—more than the investment pledged by the private infrastructure and rolling stock companies combined. Moreover, in evidence to the Transport Select Committee, Railtrack stated:

"annual steady state maintenance should be £800 million which does not provide for any catching up of outstanding work . . . Renewals are given as £570 million . . . so steady state spending on the rail infrastructure should not be less than £1370m."

That is the reality of infrastructure investment under privatisation: investment will fall not only below the levels achieved while BR was in the public sector, but below what Railtrack itself says is necessary to maintain the network.

For those in any doubt about the impact of the declining investment programme, I offer the example of an incident that took place near my constituency on the very day that Railtrack was floated. The incident began when more than 100 bottles of South African and Australian wine were

found mysteriously rolling around the railway track near Primrose hill. After intensive investigation, the bottles were traced to some ransacked wagons operated by Freightliner that had been forced to remain in vulnerable sidings because Railtrack had failed to complete the promised maintenance work that would have allowed them to proceed to their destination.

So frequent were the delays in the area that a Freightliner official was quoted as saying:

"The thieves struck lucky. Normally, the containers would have been carrying boring stuff."

It says much about the state of our railway network that modern-day highwaymen are considered lucky not because they find a vulnerable train but because it contains rick pickings.

Mr. Jessel: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), who has been on her feet since—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows full well that it is in order. The hon. Lady has the Floor.

Ms Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

More than £2 billion of taxpayers' money has been thrown away on privatisation. That money could have been invested in the network or used to buy school books or hospital beds; it could have provided us with more police on the beat; it could even have been used to cut more than 1p from the basic rate of income tax; but it was squandered on nothing more substantial than dogma. Conservative Members should remember that fact when they are out on the doorsteps this May, fighting to protect their slender majorities. Come the next election, the price for the so-called success of rail privatisation will be paid not only by the British people but by Conservative Members, their party, and their disgraceful Government.

2.19 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. John Bowis): The people who have paid the price of the discourtesy of the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) are the hon. Members who would have liked me to reply to the debate in detail. Nothing that she said gave us any clue about what her party might do were it to have the good fortune to be in charge of our railway system. The shadow railway team is more a ghost train team, although it has hardly the ghost of a shadow of policy.

Labour said that railways must be run by the state and that it would not allow rail franchising to happen. It is the party that believes that the taxpayer should pay, pay and pay again to preserve the legacy of the unpunctual, uncleaned, unimaginative, strike-ridden service that it knew and loved when it was in power. It yearns for the good old days of Jimmy Knapp and its first pledge is to put him on the British Railways Board.

Labour is to give British Rail a new name. Tunnel Vision plc or Backtrack to the Future Ltd. come to mind as it seeks to make the Rail Regulator its creature by removing his independence and ability to act impartially in the interest of the travelling public and an efficient rail system. Impartiality out, union bosses in; in with state control, out with enterprise. That sums up Labour's policy.

The previous Labour spokesman, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short), confirmed that its policy was public ownership. Labour's leader confirmed that in March at the Scottish Labour conference when he said:

"New Britain . . . where our railways are . . . publicly owned".

The hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) said it again today, adding the word "full"—its policy is full public ownership.

The hon. Member for Ladywood said:

"I don't want to use the term renationalise because it implies a blank cheque".

Too right it does. It is a cheque drawn on the account of every British taxpayer. Not using the term renationalise will not reduce the bill to every taxpayer for restoring state control. Opposition Members will not be able to fool the British people into thinking otherwise.

It is a matter not only of the cost of buying back the ownership of trains, track and freight companies but of forgoing the dramatic increase in investment in new and better services that privatisation has already achieved. Labour would either forgo the investment or make the taxpayer pay for it. Its policy is to renationalise, re-bill the taxpayer and return to the never-never land where better services were never this year or next year but some time or never. For the benefit of the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate, I might say that that is a policy scripted by Kafka, directed by Khrushchev, with a walk-on, walk-out part for Jimmy Knapp.

The debate has helped to confirm what many rail passengers already know: rail privatisation is delivering and will continue to deliver enormous benefits for the travelling public. That means new investment, extra services, better customer care, tougher passenger charters and a much better deal for the taxpayer than was possible under nationalised British Rail. A railway renaissance is going full steam ahead and it is time that our critics started to acknowledge that. That was even the theme of the opening paragraph of the speech of the hon. Member for Withington. It was certainly that of Conservative Members.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) made what I hardly dare describe as his maiden speech since returning to the Back Benches. Christopher Isherwood's book, "Mr. Norris Changes Trains", comes to mind. My hon. Friend has done that in both senses. He has changed trains in the sense that he has changed his job, but he has also changed trains for the better as part of the Government's transport team. He referred to station safety, which I take seriously. I recently issued a challenge to the rail industry to join me in developing a national secure station scheme, to give public recognition to stations that work to create a safe and secure environment for their passengers and staff. Station safety is the way to encourage people to use stations, especially at night. We would do well to heed his points about visibility of security measures.

My hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) referred in his forceful speech, as did the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey), to what I might describe as the seven-year itch in respect of the planning for franchising. I have some comfort for my hon. Friend, who referred to the fact that franchises of up to 15 years have been awarded. There are three 15-year franchises and several 10-year franchises, and they are geared to the

[Mr. John Bowis]

investment programme, particularly for the rolling stock necessary to improve the service. We can be a little less ungenerous to the Treasury on that matter, but I have no doubt that the Treasury, as always at this time of year, is listening to what we are saying.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) referred to Christmas fares, and I can assure him that there is no question of fares being increased on the Cardiff line. All that is happening is that one type of cheap day fare will be restricted for a limited period so as to limit overcrowding. Those fares, as well as others elsewhere, are regulated and capped at the RPI for the next two years, and at the RPI minus one for four years thereafter. That is a commitment that we shall keep.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody)—who, like my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest, gave me notice that she could not be here for the winding-up speech—referred to safety. I yield to no one in my determination to keep safety at the top of the agenda on our railways. We have a good rail safety record and we are determined to keep it. Some of the nonsense that is talked from time to time about there being no independent safety executive needs to be nailed. We have the Health and Safety Executive, which is independent of the railways and the Government, and which has the task of ensuring that safety measures are implemented and maintained.

We consulted the Health and Safety Executive in the run-up to privatisation, and all its requirements were accepted by the Government and the railways and have been put into place. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich also referred to compensation, and she should know that, since 1994, we have had a single point of reference for people wishing to claim compensation. There is no question of people not knowing where to go. A clear undertaking has been signed up to by everyone concerned, and there is an arbitration system to allot the elements of blame, and hence compensation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) referred to cold winters in the future. I cannot predict the weather—even new Labour cannot claim to do that. But as a result of privatisation, there is a requirement on Railtrack, through financial incentives, to make sure that services continue to be provided. To that extent, we have a greater power to ensure that Railtrack takes the necessary steps. If not, it will lose financially. I shall draw those matters, as well as the points that my hon. Friend made about the taxi queue at Waterloo, to Railtrack's attention. He referred also to matters for which South West Trains is responsible.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) made some important points about safety on the railway lines, and particularly about the safety of children. I shall read her speech carefully to see what she said about education through schools and the need to be constantly vigilant. We know that we cannot protect every inch of track—any more than we can protect every inch of road—from a child running on it because he knows no better, or because he has something mischievous or malevolent in mind. But we shall go on trying to ensure that those matters are taken into account.

Rail privatisation has had its critics over the past four and a half years—every privatisation that preceded it has had its critics. Each privatisation has been dogged by scare stories about deteriorating services, higher prices and vanishing investment, and each one has been triumphantly vindicated. One has only to look at British Airways, British Telecom and others to see how effective privatisation has been. Misrepresentation leads to public concerns. My hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads went through many of the allegations that were made at the time and nailed them one by one with the facts.

The public have begun to understand the enormous benefits that are coming as a result of the Government having had the courage of their convictions and introducing measures to privatise our railways and improve services. That is being reflected even in the press. *Modern Railways* said:

"Certainly there is a new spirit abroad which is really encouraging."

The *Financial Times* stated:

"long awaited improvements have become possible because, behind the scenes, the privatised operators are implementing changes which BR found too difficult to handle".

Transport 2000, not usually an ally of ours, published its comment entitled "Were we wrong?" and pointed out the good news stories that are emerging—new trains, extra staff, more bus-rail connections, planning even for space for bicycles on trains—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

CONTRACT (SCOTLAND) BILL

Ordered,

That the Contract (Scotland) Bill shall no longer stand referred to a Second Reading Committee and shall be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

Orders of the Day

SCOTTISH LEGAL SERVICES OMBUDSMAN AND COMMISSIONER FOR LOCAL ADMINISTRATION IN SCOTLAND BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 94E (Scottish Grand Committee (Bills in relation to their principle)),

That the Bill be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

Question agreed to.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That—

(1) at the meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee on Monday 25th November—

(a) proceedings on the substantive Motion for the Adjournment of the Committee shall lapse at One o'clock; and

(b) notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (3) of Standing Order No. 94E (Scottish Grand Committee (bills in relation to their principle)), the Chairman shall put any Question necessary to dispose of any Motion which may then be made in relation to the Contract (Scotland) Bill at Two o'clock, if not previously concluded;

(2) at the meeting of the Committee on Monday 9th December—

(a) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 94D(2)(b) (Scottish Grand Committee (ministerial statements)), the proceedings on any ministerial statement which may be made shall be brought to a conclusion not later than half an hour after their commencement;

(b) proceedings on the substantive Motion for the Adjournment of the Committee shall lapse at half-past One o'clock; and

(c) notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (3) of Standing Order No. 94E (Scottish Grand Committee (bills in relation to their principle)), the Chairman shall put any Question necessary to dispose of any Motion which may then be made in relation to the Scottish Legal Services Ombudsman and Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland Bill at half-past Two o'clock, if not previously concluded;

(3) at the meetings of the Committee on Monday 13th January and Monday 17th February, proceedings on the substantive Motion for the Adjournment of the Committee shall lapse at half-past One o'clock;

(4) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 94B (Scottish Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)), notices of questions for Monday 17th February may be given on Tuesday 4th February; and

(5) the Order of the House [6th November] shall be amended—

(a) in paragraph (2), by leaving out the word 'Scotland' and inserting the words 'South Lanarkshire Council Buildings, Hamilton'; and

(b) in paragraph (3), by adding at the end the words 'to consider a substantive Motion for the Adjournment of the Committee.'.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 21st November, the Speaker shall not later than Seven o'clock put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to the impact of a windfall tax on the privatised utilities.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

Televised Pornography

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe (Leigh): I begin by recording my appreciation and gratitude to the Speaker's Office for giving me the opportunity to debate a highly sensitive, important and disturbing subject—televised pornography.

There is grave and growing concern on the part of the public, especially parents, that if allowed to go unchecked, television pornography could condition and corrupt our society into accepting sexual and violent practices which, even a decade ago, would have been totally unacceptable and regarded as an affront to every moral precept.

Television pornography is fast becoming one of our largest growth industries—possibly the only growth industry that we have had for a considerable time, but I shall not move into that political stratum. It is a growth industry in Britain, and even more so in Europe and throughout the world. Its growth in this country is partly due to the legal loopholes available to the merchants of porn, mainly because of the weakness of the European Commission proposals.

I am disturbed by the indifferent attitude shown by those responsible for enforcing the limited legal powers available. It is apparent to me that they do not take their job seriously enough to bring about a contraction in such entertainment. Prosecutions rarely take place. A greater sense of responsibility and direction is needed if the authorities are to use their powers of regulation to deal with the unpleasant people involved. If the limited powers were used properly, we could to some degree control and obstruct the porn kings. By failing to do so, we are encouraging a generation of millionaire porn merchants. If we do not control them, sooner or later they will control us. It is imperative that we have the moral will and the legal means to stop them before they take over and fill the British media with undesirable programmes—which are broadcast already, albeit late at night. I shall not go into detail about the four existing sex channels, including TVX, Playboy and the Adult Channel. I am told that another two—Baby Lon Blue and the Adam and Eve channel—could be licensed in the near future.

Much research has been conducted in this area. I refer hon. Members to an excellent investigative article by Sean Poulter which appeared in the *Daily Mail* on 30 September. He pointed out that we are faced with an avalanche of satellite sex which can be traced to the 1989 European Union directive regarding broadcasting laws throughout Europe and the publication of an article entitled "Television Without Frontiers". It is no doubt that those moves encouraged the EU television porn kings. Once a satellite station is licensed in one country, other countries have uninhibited access to it for broadcast. Such action is allowed, regardless of a country's stance in seeking to block that sort of insidious and indescribable filth.

Mr. Poulter referred to the Government's claim that they are winning the battle against satellite porn and then produced evidence to show that 27 hard-core films are available in Britain every night of the week. That is a disgrace, but it is permissible in law because we do not plug the loopholes.

[Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe]

The Euro directive is quite clear, but I do not see why the British Government cannot take the initiative. EU member states retain the capacity to determine the means whereby they have responsibility for defining the terms "pornography" and

"might harm the development of minors"

in accordance with national moral standards. They can request a review at any time. The British Government must take a vigorous stand in the face of lax legislation—they should stop pussy-footing around and do it.

Every week my constituency postbag is filled with letters about this disturbing subject and it is high time that the Government took notice. It is no use Back Benchers like me continually plugging away if the regulators, whom we expect to safeguard our interests, and the Government appear indifferent and slow to act. It is a complex issue. "Pornography" has several meanings and there is no strict line of demarcation. It cannot be beyond the wit of the House and the industry to agree a common code of practice that is commensurate with decent British standards. Article 12 of the directive provides that television advertising should not prejudice respect for human dignity, while article 16 provides that television advertising should not cause moral or physical detriment to minors.

There does not seem to be any check on the advancement of unencrypted advertising for hard-core porn channels. There should be something to distinguish such commercial advertising under the Obscene Publications Act 1959. We should start there to see what we can salvage from the wreckage. It is an unholy mess and everybody knows that. It is time it was tackled more vigorously than it is at present. The House will know as well as I do of mass media communications—the Internet, journals and newspapers—dedicated to the selling of porn. They are all there. They are not stocked on the top shelf. They are in every newsagent's shop. Every computer magazine has advertisements saying that it is possible to reach 200 channels which provide the type of entertainment that they claim is a vital service to the public. There is no doubt that it is commercial interests which dictate the morals of that type of service. The advertisers say that they are broad-minded puritans just launching a commercial initiative, declaring that there is a demand for it—the law of supply and demand—and that they should be free.

We have seen what has happened on the Internet. Parents can be forgiven for thinking that the computer world has gone mad. According to the media, children are being bombarded with computer pornography. Individuals are being prosecuted for sending details of violent fantasies halfway around the world. Schools, colleges and companies are wondering what is stored on their computers. It is a minefield of unpredictable material, and if the people who produced it were to knock on our doors, many of us would not let them beyond the threshold. This insidious method of getting into the living rooms of this country—and, for that matter, the countries of western Europe—Soho-type entertainment should be tackled and barred as quickly as possible.

The days of the personal computer being an isolated unit have gone. If we are not careful, there will be access to this type of porn in the schools through videos and so on and assessed, some would say, as educational progress. I do not accept, and neither do many of my hon. Friends, what is known as "Internet intimacy". At least 60 porn news groups can be found, ranging from written erotica to pictures covering all sorts of pornography—bondage, paedophilia, and so on. Both *Penthouse* and *Playboy* have worldwide web pages. It is possible to pick up something from Los Angeles or Las Vegas at any time, to get pictures, visual aids, that do nothing but arouse sexual instincts. I agree that the problem is complex and I am sure that the Minister will quote something.

There is sex on the system. Many computer magazines advertise an assortment of different computer software and services available, including Wet Dreams Collection, 11 discs for £15; 3-D Sex BBS; Hustler Online, the Electronic Land of Milk and Honey; Private Previews 1, "You're in full control". It is a case of, "Put it on, look for the nice girl up the road"—that sort of depraved technique. One can see "Indian Beauties" on a £10 floppy disc.

Some people believe that we should turn our backs and not try to arrest the problem. They think that we should be broad-minded and not keep our youngsters in ignorance of such sexual activities and that such material should be freely available. Top-shelf magazines of soft pornography can be obtained around the corner from the House. They contain detailed photographs of female sex organs and advertisements for hard pornographic material, contact networks and mail order sex shops. Such is the trend that, even in the United Kingdom, the public spend an estimated £60 million a year on 100 different pornographic magazines. There is no legal requirement for newsagents to display such magazines on the top shelf, where at least they would be out of the way and reachable only by adults and not by youngsters. Newsagents can legally sell pornographic magazines to children under 18.

Another problematic area that should be tackled is satellite pornography. We should legislate against such pornography being transmitted in the late evening. The owners of satellite dishes or cable connections can watch pornographic programmes from Europe without paying a subscription. Even the Independent Television Commission—our monitoring board—does not permit channels such as TV Erotica and Eurotica. The broadcast hard-core pornography that is now available alarms hon. Members and most of the public.

As I have said, the Government should stop pussy-footing. Expert researchers—whose work I have used for my speech—have done the nation a first-class service by exposing the type of material that I have described. The Government should make it a criminal offence to manufacture, sell or possess pirated decoder cards, which are easily and cheaply available on practically every high street. It is farcical that certain software, the only purpose of which is to access banned channels, can be bought or sold without any fear of penalty.

If we care, we should take up this challenge. Politicians of all political persuasions have preached to us and have taken the high moral ground. Let their crusade begin here with a Government initiative so that, regardless of party colour, we can be proud that the standards of morality that we seek to protect will be maintained for ever. We should at least maintain the conventional standards that we expect as ordinary people with Christian beliefs. Such

activity should not remain unchecked and uninhibited. I exhort the Minister to tell his senior colleagues of the growing concern about television pornography.

2.49 pm

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe) for raising these important issues, and giving the House the opportunity to debate them. There is widespread concern in the country about standards of taste and decency on television. The Government strongly believe that there is no place for hard-core pornography in a society that cares about the protection of children. Hard-core pornography, in whatever medium, is unacceptable. I want to take this opportunity to set out clearly the situation in respect of television pornography.

The type of television material about which we are concerned falls into two distinct categories: the domestic so-called adult channels, which are licensed by the Independent Television Commission, and the channels that are receivable in the UK via satellite and transmitted from abroad by foreign broadcasters. I shall deal with each in turn.

Broadcast services that are licensed in the UK are governed by the arrangements, agreed by Parliament, in the statutory framework of the Broadcasting Acts and the BBC charter. Those arrangements place responsibility for maintaining standards of taste and decency on regulators and broadcasters. The House will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage regularly meets the broadcasting regulators and has frequently discussed matters of taste and decency with them. We have ensured that all broadcasters are held responsible for programme content. In the new BBC charter and agreement we have placed specific obligations on the corporation to maintain standards of taste and decency and given the governors a clear duty to ensure compliance with their guidelines on standards. That responsibility on the governors is new and was introduced only this year.

The BBC has also recently reviewed its producer guidelines and this week published a series of pledges to viewers, including a commitment to monitor their views and concerns. The BBC document specifically states:

"for each of us, sexual activity happens after moral decisions have been made; its portrayal therefore should not be separated from recognition of the moral process."

I welcome that recognition by the BBC of the importance of such ethics in broadcasting.

With the development of the cable and satellite broadcasting sector, there are dedicated adult channels now licensed in this country which broadcast adult erotica. Their programmes are, broadly speaking, titillation. There are at present three such channels. They are: Playboy TV, the Adult Channel, and Television X—the Fantasy Channel, all of which are licensed by the Independent Television Commission and are subject to its licence conditions and guidance codes.

To prevent viewing by children, several conditions must be met by the broadcasters. The channels are provided only on payment of a premium rate fee in addition to the cost of subscription, and must be specially selected by the customer. That is to say, they must not be offered as part of a subscription package. They are encrypted, which means that the signal is scrambled and can be unscrambled only by the appropriate smart card. They may show material of a more explicit nature than would be acceptable on mainstream channels, but only between the hours of 10 pm and 5.30 am. I am told by the ITC that channels restrict their explicit output to the hours between midnight and 5.30 am and show only material that has been given an 18 certificate by the British Board of Film Classification or has been edited to an equivalent standard. They cannot show the more explicit sexual material which might be granted a restricted 18 video classification.

The ITC is vigilant in monitoring the adult channels and has intervened where its codes have been breached—five times since 1992. These interventions take the form of warnings to the broadcasters. Four of the warnings were made shortly after the channels were introduced, and the broadcasters responded by avoiding further transgressions. In 1995, the commission upheld a complaint and gave a formal warning to Television X following the transmission of a film which included material that had been cut by the British Board of Film Classification. If necessary, the ITC has the power to issue further sanctions, including fines and, ultimately, the withdrawal of a licence. However, to date, the ITC considers that the warnings have been effective and sufficient.

Our concern to exercise proper control over standards on television extends also to films and videos. In the case of film, it is important to remember that cinemas can control access to films and ensure that children and young people are excluded from films that have been classified as unsuitable.

Videos present a more difficult problem. In the cinema, the viewer is in public, experiencing the reactions of other viewers. He is also seeing a film live—running straight through without breaks or repetition. When the same film is shown on video, it can be viewed in private and scenes can be watched over and over again. Although it is an offence to sell or rent videos to those judged too young to watch them, videos are in the home and can be misused.

The Obscene Publications Act 1959 covers the most offensive material on video, but we are concerned about the easy availability of other violent and sexually explicit videos. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary asked for a report from the British Board of Film Classification on the content and classification of videos on 5 November, and he expects to receive that report by the end of this month. The Government will consider that report closely.

I turn now to the controls we have on the unacceptable material beamed in from other countries. The services concerned are pornographic television channels that are receivable in the UK via satellite, and transmitted from abroad by foreign broadcasters. I particularly welcome the opportunity to set out the facts on this matter, which has received considerable coverage in the media recently. Some of the press coverage has, unfortunately, been misleading.

Other European countries share our desire to protect children from pornography. The television without frontiers directive, which the hon. Member for Leigh mentioned, prohibits broadcasters in all member states of the European Community from transmitting unacceptable pornographic television programmes, but the definition of

[Mr. Iain Sproat]

what is unacceptable within their frontiers is up to individual states to decide. Other states can complain if they feel the material breaches the directive. That, coupled with the powers established in our domestic legislation—the Broadcasting Act 1990—enables us to take action to restrict access to foreign broadcasters that transmit unacceptable material.

To understand the extent of the powers available to us in respect of foreign broadcasters, it is important to understand the principle of single jurisdiction. To address problems that arise from transfrontier broadcasting, it is essential to have international rules that apply equally to all signatory countries. Each country should ensure that broadcasters operating under its jurisdiction comply with the rules. For the rules to work effectively, each broadcaster must be the responsibility of one, and only one, country. Member states should not try to influence broadcasters. As a single market measure intended to allow the free flow of broadcasting throughout the Community, the directive prohibits member states from interfering with broadcasters outwith their jurisdiction. We would not take kindly, for example, to another country trying to regulate the BBC.

There is one exception to that rule, and it allows us to act against foreign broadcasters that transmit unacceptable pornography. I shall quote directly from the directive.

"Member States shall take appropriate measures to ensure that television broadcasts by broadcasters under their jurisdiction do not include programmes which might seriously impair the physical, mental or moral development of minors, in particular those that involve pornography or gratuitous violence."

That could hardly be more clear. The directive provides that, when member states believe that a breach of that provision has taken place, they may take measures against the relevant broadcaster.

A second category of programmes, which contain material that is unsuitable for children but is of a less damaging nature, such as those licensed by the ITC, can be broadcast only when it can be ensured that, by selecting the time of broadcast—late at night—or by technical measures such as encryption, children are prevented from viewing it.

A recent judgment by the European Court of Justice found that the UK had misinterpreted some of the provisions on jurisdiction. The Government are considering the court's judgment carefully and, in doing so, will have regard to on-going negotiations on the revision of the directive. However, the important point for us to recognise today is that the judgment had no bearing whatever on our powers to take action against satellite pornography.

The Broadcasting Act 1990 established powers for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage to proscribe foreign satellite services that broadcast programmes which offend against good taste or decency. In doing so, she may act only upon a notification by the Independent Television Commission, which takes the initial view on which services are considered unacceptable. Upon receiving such a notification, the Secretary of State may make a proscription order when she considers that to do so would be in the public interest and would be compatible with the UK's international obligations.

What is a proscription order? A proscription order declares a broadcaster unacceptable and creates criminal offences for various acts in support of a proscribed broadcaster. It makes acts such as the supply of smart cards, the supply of programme material, advertising on or for the channel, publishing details of programmes and the provision of any other service in support of the broadcaster criminal offences. By stopping the sale of smart cards, we restrict access to those channels in the UK.

Two proscription orders against pornographic broadcasters—those against Red Hot Television and TV Erotica—have already proven successful in restricting access to those services in the UK. On both occasions, we were supported in our action by the European Commission, which confirmed that our action was compatible with Community law.

On 10 October, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made a third such order, against a foreign broadcaster called Rendez-Vous Television, which broadcasts an unremitting diet of explicit hard-core pornography in clear breach of the European directive.

The proscription order against Rendez-Vous came into force only on 31 October, so it is still too early to assess its effectiveness, but I believe it will have the desired effect of significantly reducing the possibility of such objectionable material being seen in the UK, and above all, being seen by children.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 18 November 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Southern Arts

1. **Mr. Faber:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what will be the outturn costs for funding of Southern Arts in 1996–97. [2833]

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): The forecast outturn costs of Southern Arts in 1996-97 are £4,306,000.

Mr. Faber: In view of that generous figure, can my hon. Friend explain why Southern Arts has this year seen fit to slash the core funding that it makes available to the Athenaeum theatre in Warminster in my constituency? Is he aware that this popular local theatre is now in something of a quandary in that, if it puts on the popular theatre that people want to see, it loses funding on artistic criteria grounds, but if it puts on the politically correct claptrap that Southern Arts wants it to put on, no one comes to see its productions? Does my hon. Friend agree that the Athenaeum is precisely the kind of popular, small, local theatre that we should be doing more to support? Will he draw this case to the attention of the Arts Council?

Mr. Sproat: I know from our discussions of the keen interest that my hon. Friend takes in the Athenaeum theatre in Warminster. Given that the Arts Council provides some 82 per cent. of Southern Arts' funding, I shall draw Southern Arts' activities to the attention of the chairman of the Arts Council.

Millennium Projects

2. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what forecasts she has made of expenditure on millennium projects for each year until 2000. [2834]

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): The Millennium Commission currently has grant commitments totalling £721 million, and plans to spend more than £1 billion on capital projects. The commission expects to offer a £200 million grant to the millennium exhibition and to allocate £200 million to millennium awards to individuals.

Annual expenditure is led by the progress of projects, with lottery income determining expenditure levels. The commission expects cash outgoings to rise to around £100 million this year, £350 million in 1997-98 and £450 million in 1998-99.

Mr. Corbyn: Is not the Secretary of State a bit alarmed by the volume of expenditure going on a number of millennium projects that cannot be said to be of much long-term value or any social benefit? I am thinking of projects such as the ludicrous ferris wheel that it is proposed to build across the river from here. Does she think that it would be better if, as a nation heading into the 21st century, we set the real objective of ensuring that every homeless person had a roof over his head and that there was no longer a housing shortage? People who are desperate for a roof over their head, or somewhere decent to bring up their children, are not excited by the idea of 2,000 ft high office blocks, a ferris wheel or exhibition centres. Does she think that we should be considering this country's social needs as a priority and an indication of how we want to live in the next century?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we should use lottery money cautiously and sensibly with a view to the long term. I note that his constituency has already received about £2.25 million in 22 awards for worthwhile and exciting projects such as a law centre and schemes to help young and disadvantaged people and to provide child care.

I and the Millennium Commission regard the marking of the millennium as a moment of great importance, when we should be making a statement about our achievements, abilities and potential as we move into the next century. I am delighted that, only the other day, my shadow was commending the millennium exhibition and the great opportunity that it would provide for Britain.

Mr. Jessel: Is not the millennium exhibition of great social value, in that it will generate jobs for 5,000 people, regenerate a deprived area of inner London and attract a large number of tourists to Britain, whose spending generates a massive amount of employment? Will not people be absolutely astonished if we get to the millennium and there is no great central national exhibition to mark it?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is right. The Greenwich exhibition offers the prospect of an enormous regeneration project, creating a huge number of jobs. The Labour party cannot be trusted on any aspect of the lottery. Its Front-Bench spokesmen did not support the National Lottery etc. Bill on Second Reading. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) said that it would lead to a great threat to jobs. The Henley centre recently said that, overall, the lottery would result in 110,000 new jobs, with 28,000 created this year alone.

Mr. Raynsford: Does the Secretary of State agree that, with just over three years to go before the start of the millennium year, there is no time to waste if we are to make a success of the exhibition? Like everyone who has seen the models and plans, she will know that the exhibition has the potential to be a hugely exciting showcase for all that is good in Britain in 2000 and a worthy successor to the great exhibition of 1851 and the

1951 festival of Britain. If that potential is to be realised, it is essential that there should be no prevarication or delay and that the Secretary of State and the Deputy Prime Minister, who is also involved, should give an absolute commitment to delivering it in time and on budget.

Mrs. Bottomley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman; he is right to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, who has played an important part. Tribute should also be paid to Simon Jenkins, the chairman of the exhibition committee, and to the member of the committee nominated by the Leader of the Opposition.

The exhibition is an exciting prospect. I was delighted that my opposite number, the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), said only the other day:

"The millennium exhibition is a huge opportunity for attracting foreign visitors to Britain. This is the ideal chance . . . to show that they can provide the same level of service within the UK as they do for people travelling overseas."

I have further encouraging news for the hon. Gentleman. Last Friday, the Highways Agency announced that the last two contracts for the M11-A12 link road had been awarded, ensuring that that piece of transport infrastructure will be in place. I travelled on the Jubilee line extension from Stratford to North Greenwich the other day—

Mr. Tony Banks: You did not tell me.

Mrs. Bottomley: In parenthesis, I apologise to the hon. Gentleman.

There is progress with English Partnerships, and further sponsorship proposals are coming through. I recognise that hon. Members want to bring all uncertainty to an end. The Millennium Commission shares that wish. I hope that the final aspects will have been resolved before our meeting on 11 December.

Mr. Dicks: What is the difference between one day and another and one date and another? Is not the whole millennium thing a load of nonsense? I never thought that I would come to say this, but for once in my political life I agree with the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn).

Mrs. Bottomley: It is said that a kind of millennium fever is inclined to take over communities, making them believe that pigs may fly. Having heard my hon. Friend's comments, I am beginning to think that it may have affected the House. It seems to me that, in times of uncertainty and turbulence, the millennium offers this country and the planet the opportunity for a moment of regeneration and renewal to bind communities together. That is the spirit that the Millennium Commission has sought to pursue. Overall, it is widely welcomed.

Dr. Moonie: May I point out to the Secretary of State that my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) and I voted in favour of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993? It does not become her to suggest otherwise.

The Labour party has always supported the concept of the millennium exhibition at Greenwich, and will continue to do so. Given the failure of the Deputy Prime Minister to secure one signed cheque from the private sector to help meet the cost of the exhibition, the continuing arguments about ownership of the site, the rumours of rapidly escalating costs and the absence to date of a board of directors for the project, will the Secretary of State assure the House that the exhibition will be completed on time and within budget? If she cannot give that assurance, when can we expect a full statement on the subject?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman recalls that he was not a Front-Bench spokesman at the time of the Second Reading of the National Lottery etc. Bill.

On the hon. Gentleman's serious point, he is absolutely right to say that there can be no question of anyone signing a blank cheque for the millennium exhibition. It is precisely that point that Barry Hartop, the chief executive of the proposed operating company under the chairmanship of Bob Ayling, is examining prior to the Millennium Commission meeting on 11 December. Neither the Millennium Commission nor, for all the elements of the exhibition that turn to us for support, the Government will be prepared to sign a blank cheque.

I welcome the Labour party's constructive approach. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that his party's nominee, Michael Montagu, is a member of the commission. I appreciate the number of informal discussions that have taken place throughout the process. The exhibition is a magnificent project, and no magnificent project anywhere in the world is completed without some difficulty and some anxiety as the deadline is approached. I am confident that we are keeping to the appropriate timetable and, as the hon. Gentleman knows, I have made it clear that I am happy for information to be given to the Labour party on a number of matters of detail. I have no wish for the exhibition to become the subject of party political disagreement.

Arts Sponsorship

4. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of her Department's initiatives to boost private sector sponsorship of the arts. [2836]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Since its inception in 1984, the Government's pairing scheme for the arts has brought more than £110 million of new money into the arts. Earlier this year, I announced improvements to the scheme aimed at encouraging longer-term partnerships between businesses and arts organisations and projects which increase access to the arts. Indications so far are that the new rules are proving popular with arts organisations and businesses alike.

Mr. Colvin: My right hon. Friend has clearly acknowledged the outstanding success of the business sponsorship pairing scheme. Will she take this opportunity to congratulate the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts, which administers the scheme? Does my right hon. Friend have the measure of the Chancellor? When we hear the Budget statement next week, shall we see a continuation and, if possible, an extension of the business sponsorship pairing scheme?

Does my right hon. Friend agree that Hillier's gardens and arboretum, which she saw on Saturday in my constituency and which form a heritage project drawing

in money from all sources—Government money, local government money, business sponsorship money, private funding and, we hope soon, lottery money—are a good example of how multiple sourcing for the arts and the heritage is probably the way forward?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is quite right to praise the pairing scheme and the work of ABSA. It has been a formidable success, added to now by the massive increase in funding for the arts through the national lottery and support from central Government and local government. We now see a renaissance and excitement in the arts which was rarely seen in previous years.

My hon. Friend also commended the Sir Harold Hillier gardens, which are an enormously exciting opportunity for further funds from the lottery heritage fund. I cannot, of course, comment on the application, but I can see the great opportunity for investing in the natural environment. Another local project, the Bursledon windmill, is a wonderful example of the industrial and rural heritage, both of which stand to benefit from our tremendous national lottery.

Millennium Celebration

5. **Mr. Alison:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consideration is being given to emphasising the Christian character of the millennium celebration. [2837]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government recognise that the millennium marks the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Christ. I have spoken with the Archbishop of Canterbury about how this can best be reflected in a national celebration of the millennium. My Department has set up a millennium co-ordinating group on which the Churches are represented. The Millennium Commission has funded a number of projects reflecting the Christian character of the millennium, including grants for church bells and bell towers and for church floodlighting. The beginning of the third millennium will be a time of renewal and celebration for people of all faiths and for those with none.

Mr. Alison: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that encouraging answer. Does she recall that our forebears at the time of the previous millennium started to build our great cathedrals as a fitting landmark of the Christian heritage? Does she agree that a modern equivalent landmark might be the millennium Christian village project, of which the hon. Member for Newham, North–East (Mr. Timms) and I have given her details?

Mrs. Bottomley: I did indeed meet the team and I was enormously impressed by the millennium Christian village project. Involving young people in promoting spiritual renewal and regeneration is extremely important at this special time. My right hon. Friend will also be aware of the recent announcement by English Heritage and the National Heritage Memorial Fund of an additional £20 million a year to invest in the built heritage of our churches. I welcome the document on ecclesiastical heritage issued today by the Church of England. Our churches form part of the fabric of our villages, towns and communities and it is important that we invest in their built heritage as well as the spiritual renewal of our country.

Mr. Dalyell: Rather than investing in grandiose projects, would it not be best to concentrate much-needed money on the simple restoration needs of mediaeval churches? The Secretary of State need go no further than the crypt of the House of the Commons to see the deterioration that is being caused—perhaps through water ingress—to such unusual pieces of religious art as the picture of Judas Iscariot? Should we not look to our own House of Commons as an example of what should be done by way of restoration?

Mrs. Bottomley: I shall certainly look into the matter. Having opened the Houses of Parliament art exhibition this morning, I believe that our House is in order in that regard, thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin). However, the hon. Gentleman is right to refer to the many small projects that should be funded. So far, 104 churches have received lottery funding amounting to £10.3 million. There are many other projects. For example, some 400 churches are involved in a floodlighting scheme, and there are also schemes for church bells. As the hon. Gentleman said, small schemes as well as large ones should be part of the tapestry of provision.

Sir Patrick Cormack: May I refer my right hon. Friend to the initiative that the Archbishop of Canterbury launched this morning, to which she referred? Will she give a firm pledge that not only extra lottery money, but more money from the Government, whose real responsibility it is, will go towards the restoration and maintenance of our historic churches? There can be no fitter way of commemorating the millennium than ensuring their survival through the next century.

Mrs. Bottomley: I shall note the comments by my hon. Friend, who has been extremely constructive in helping us to make considerable progress in easing access to and understanding of schemes for churches and cathedrals. Substantially more money is spent on those projects, although a high standard of conservation practice is required. Investment in our churches is one of the most worthwhile heritage projects that we can support.

Mr. Tony Banks: I am not averse to crucifying a few Tories to celebrate the millennium or, indeed, feeding them to the lions, but will the Secretary of State bear in mind that we live in a multi-faith society? According to the Jewish calendar, this year is 5757, according to the Islamic calendar it is 1417, according to the Indian Hindu calendar it is 2054, and according to the Bengali Hindu calendar it is 1403. [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] Of course I am; I could not remember all those dates. In those circumstances, we could be in permanent millennium mode. The only thing that would put me off—and upset the country—is the thought that the right hon. Lady would be in charge of the celebrations.

Mrs. Bottomley: I am disappointed to hear the hon. Gentleman being so uncharacteristically ungentlemanly. I am a Conservative and Britain is a Christian country. It is a Christian millennium. Having said that, I accept that we

live in a multi-faith society, and I am pleased that the Millennium Commission and other distributing bodies have been supporting projects from a range of faiths. For example, the Millennium Commission is looking sympathetically, at an exciting project supported by the Hindu community in Preston, and other similar ventures.

Sport in Schools

6. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she is taking in respect of competitive sport in schools; and if she will make a statement. [2838]

Mr. Sproat: The Government are determined to restore competitive team games to the heart of school life. It is a crucial element of our overall strategy for sport, which ranges from revived sport in schools, through sport scholarships for top athletes, to the British academy of sport.

Mr. Congdon: I warmly welcome the Government's strategy of trying to get competitive sports back into schools, and particularly welcome the announcement of the proposal to give scholarships to athletes as young as 11. Will my hon. Friend also encourage initiatives such as that being undertaken at Ashburton high school in my constituency, where a feasibility study is being carried out into providing dual use sports facilities for the school?

Mr. Sproat: I know of the project at Ashburton high school from previous discussions with my hon. Friend, and I congratulate him on the vigour with which he supports it. I shall gladly draw the attention of the Sports Council to what he says about that excellent project.

Tourism

7. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals she has to encourage overseas visitors to London to visit the regions and countries within the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement. [2839]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We want overseas visitors to benefit from travel to the countries and regions of the United Kingdom. The image of London is still Britain's best known image abroad, and it is of great benefit to the whole country. The focus London initiative, to which we have allocated an additional £4 million of public money over the past year, highlights the great diversity Britain offers and the ease of access from London. Last year alone, the British Tourist Authority's British travel centre in London gave help and advice on travelling outside the capital to nearly half a million overseas visitors.

Mr. McAvoy: I accept what the Secretary of State says about the attractions of London; I have no quarrel with it. Is she aware, however, that half the overseas visitors to the United Kingdom visit only London? Surely that is an unacceptable imbalance, bearing in mind the tourist attractions of the regions of England, Northern Ireland, Wales and, of course, Scotland. If she accepts that principle, should she not be trying to do more than she has stated to get people out of London and the south-east to other parts of the country? That would help to reverse some of the drain of defeated Scottish Tory Members of Parliament—who have taken the low road to England to get seats—such as her Minister of State.

Mrs. Bottomley: Since he represents the wonderful city of Glasgow, the hon. Gentleman is only too well aware of its huge tourism potential. If I may make a domestic comment, when I spoke to my mother last night, she said that she had just returned from a three-day stay in Glasgow during which she saw the Burrell collection and visited other wonderful museums. I shall do my best to promote Glasgow, as well as other cities.

The British travel centre works extremely effectively to ensure that those who register inquiries are encouraged to visit cities throughout the United Kingdom. From my point of view, whether such cities are in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland is of little significance. We have wonderful cities and countryside and should take the opportunity of the best tourism growth for 20 years to promote not only our capital city but the entire country.

Mr. Mans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one way to discourage visitors from going to her county of Surrey is to list various buildings on the former aerospace site at Farnborough, which would mean that the air show would leave this country for Berlin and that the full potential for aerospace heritage on that site could not be commemorated as we approach the end of the first century of aerospace activities?

Mrs. Bottomley: I congratulate my hon. Friend on being a great champion of his cause, and ingenious in finding ways of addressing it in various settings. As the constituency Member of Parliament, I am well aware of the excitement, prosperity and jobs that the Farnborough air show brings to the area. I am also aware of the responsibilities of the Department of National Heritage for proper behaviour with regard to listing. We are consulting on the heritage Green Paper, and this matter is one of the types of consideration that we are addressing. I shall certainly bear in mind my hon. Friend's comments.

Mr. Pendry: The Secretary of State talks of producing a tourism strategy document next year; surely she is aware of our strategic document, "Breaking New Ground", which was launched to great acclaim at the world travel market last week, following wide consultation. In the document, we spell out measures to ensure that overseas visitors are attracted to Britain in greater number in future. Those measures include positive proposals to improve the standards of hotel accommodation, the quality of service and the introduction of a new development of tourism Bill. Instead of undertaking a costly and time-consuming exercise, surely the Secretary of State should join the tourism industry, including Richard Branson, the Granada and Tussaud groups, the Tourism Society and many others who welcomed our document, and get a move on and implement those proposals.

Mrs. Bottomley: I wondered whether the hon. Gentleman would have the gall to mention his document, which sank without trace. I commend more the remarks of the director-general of the Confederation of British Industry, who congratulated the Department of National Heritage on all we are doing to recognise the importance

of tourism. The real point about the hon. Gentleman's document is that it is a recipe for regulation, bureaucracy and cost. That is the old-fashioned cocktail that the Labour party always believes in. All the tourism industry wanted was the Labour party to say that it would fight against the minimum wage, the social chapter and the 48-hour week, which are likely to cost £100 million and affect 15 per cent. of the industry. That is what the industry wanted, and it is what the Labour party has singularly failed to deliver.

Screen Violence

8. **Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what recent representations she has received concerning violence on television and in films. [2840]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My Department has received 65 letters about screen violence during the past three months. I shall meet the chairmen of the BBC, the Independent Television Commission and the Broadcasting Standards Council again shortly to consider how they are responding, and might respond further, to the public's concern on the issue, which, as I have often made clear, I share.

Mr. Jenkin: I thank my right hon. Friend for her initiatives on the matter. Does she agree that there is no doubt that the constant screening of television violence permeates society and affects people's behaviour, especially that of the more vulnerable children in society? Will she disregard such bits of propaganda as the survey produced by Sheffield university, which purports to have produced an analysis showing a reduction in the depiction of violence on television? We all know that it is not so much the timing and content of violence as the insidious nature of portrayals of violence that causes so much concern and damage to society.

Mrs. Bottomley: I totally endorse my hon. Friend's comments. The problem is not only the number of violent incidents, which has fallen, but the quality of their portrayal and how powerful they are in influencing behaviour. I congratulate my hon. Friend on the way in which he pursues the cause—representing, as I know he does, the National Viewers and Listeners Association, whose headquarters are in his area. We must be determined to achieve further progress, and that is the message that I shall reinforce to the regulators. I shall congratulate them on some encouraging signs so far, but tell them that the people of Britain will not be satisfied until they see that commitment translated into practice.

Mr. Maxton: Will the Secretary of State and all Conservative Members who are so concerned about violence in society, instead of worrying about violence on television, take the first active step this evening by voting for a total ban on handguns?

Mrs. Bottomley: The position on that matter is clear. I hoped that the hon. Gentleman was going to say that we should be worried not only about what we see on our television screens, but about what young people do with their time. That is one of the reasons we have been so anxious to change the lottery rules to enable more investment in sport, training and coaching. Later this week, the Arts Council will make announcements about arts for everyone, to encourage our young people to be involved in worthwhile activities. I am pleased that we are able to fund initiatives to take that forward.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the fact that the BBC has recently published new producers' guidelines on such issues as sex and violence on television?

As most young children are now so computer-literate that they can decode the V-chip with the greatest of ease, does my right hon. Friend agree that the main responsibility for keeping children away from violence on television lies with parents?

Mrs. Bottomley: Parents undoubtedly have a key responsibility. The worrying development of children having televisions in their own rooms means that they can watch television in an isolated way, and I would suggest that, in such cases, the messages of violence are more powerful. I congratulate the BBC on its statement of promises and on its revised producers' guidelines; the House will watch with great care to ensure that they are translated into action.

I share my hon. Friend's concerns about the V-chip. We must learn from Canada's experience and ensure that it works in practice. My Department is examining the V-chip, but I suggest—as does my hon. Friend—that it will not be a substitute for parental responsibility.

National Lottery (Derbyshire)

9. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list all payments from the national lottery awarded in Derbyshire. [2841]

Mr. Sproat: To date, the national lottery distributing bodies have made a total of 112 awards worth a total of £7,105,070 to projects in Derbyshire. A full reply will be published in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Skinner: That is quite remarkable, because when my hon. Friend the Member for North–East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) wanted to find out from the Government the ranking of constituencies in terms of awards, he was told that he could not have the information as it would involve disproportionate cost. He then went to the Library and, for £15, was able to find out that the three local Labour constituencies—Chesterfield, North-East Derbyshire and Bolsover—were in the lowest 10 per cent. of all the constituencies in Britain. Is it not remarkable that the Secretary of State—who we cannot stop yacking on television about "spreading good news"—refuses to provide real information that is uncomfortable for the Government? There is one law for the friends of the Secretary of State down here, and another for Labour constituencies in the north.

Mr. Sproat: I have apologised in writing to the hon. Member for North–East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) for the Department misunderstanding his question, and I very gladly apologise to him again now. Derbyshire has not done so badly. Of the 101 counties in the United Kingdom, it is ranked 52nd, which is not too bad. If the

hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) wants some more lottery projects in his constituency, perhaps he will do some more work to get them.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree—*[Interruption.]*—if he can hear me over the barracking—that many counties have done extremely well out of the lottery, but that others were perhaps slow off the mark in deciding to apply for lottery funding because their Members of Parliament were against the lottery distributing money to so many good causes?

Mr. Sproat: There are many reasons why different constituencies and counties get more or fewer projects. The distributing bodies have been told by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that they must take account of geographical distribution, but they are not allowed to solicit projects and are bound to consider each on its merits, which means that there will be a difference in spread around the country.

Channel 4

10. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her policy for the future funding of Channel 4; and if she will make a statement. [2843]

Mr. Sproat: The Government's policy on Channel 4 funding remains as set out during the passage of the Broadcasting Act 1996—to remove mandatory payments to the reserve immediately and to reduce the liability for payments to channel 3 in two stages in 1998 and 1999.

Mr. Whittingdale: Will my hon. Friend congratulate Channel 4 on its success in avoiding recourse to the safety net and on making a profit last year of £128 million? Does that not demonstrate that it is possible for Channel 4 to meet its remit and to operate commercially? Will he therefore consider its privatisation at the first opportunity?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend makes a good point about the profits of Channel 4, on which I congratulate the company. I well remember his brief, yet powerful, speech on 18 June in favour of the privatisation of Channel 4. The Government have made no decision about privatising the channel, but we keep all options under review.

Mr. Chris Davies: Will the Minister go further and rule out any prospect of privatising Channel 4? Does he accept that the quality and diversity of broadcasting offered by the 35 television channels in New York compare poorly with that offered by the four channels here? The public service obligation is an important principle and it should be maintained.

Mr. Sproat: I have no doubt that the Government will take full account of what happens in New York and in Channel 4 when considering all the options.

Dr. Moonie: A suspicious man might consider that there was some significance in the fact that the hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale), who asked the main question, and the Minister are wearing the same old school tie; fortunately, the Minister did not see his way to going quite as far as some of us might have feared. We join him in welcoming the increased funds available to Channel 4, which will immediately be channelled into programming. What discussions has he had with Channel 4 about the routes through which the funding will go? Will he state his support for the principle of Channel 4 as it was set up—as a publicly funded and operated channel, catering for minority tastes and interests?

Mr. Sproat: We have had discussions with Channel 4 about rejigging the funding formula, and will have further discussions as seem appropriate. As far as privatisation is concerned, I will support the Government line.

Tourism

11. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what measures she plans to take to improve the competitiveness of the tourism industry. [2844]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Following the recent launch of my Department's latest report in the "Competing with the Best" series, we are working with the industry on an action plan to improve the quality of tourism's most important resource—its people. We are co-operating with local government and the tourist boards on the follow-up to the recent conference on tourism and the planning system. My Department and the tourist boards are now working with the recently established industry forum to draw up a new strategy for tourism, which I plan to publish early next year.

Mr. Hughes: Let me make it clear that if my old school had a tie, this would not be it.

Mr. Boateng: Chip on your shoulder.

Mr. Hughes: Fifteen-love.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be foolish indeed to harm an industry that employs more than 1.5 million people and contributes more than £38 million to the gross national product by introducing the measures proposed in the social chapter—a minimum wage and a 48-hour week? Is not the real message to anyone living in a town that depends so much on tourism that a Labour Government would not only damage wealth but would rob the area of jobs?

Mrs. Bottomley: Whether or not my hon. Friend went to the right school, he certainly makes the right point about protecting tourism. The minimum wage, the social chapter and the working time directive all present major threats to an industry that relies on a flexible work force. That is the key message that comes over time and again. Ramon Pajares of the Savoy Group said:

> "What I want from Government is the freedom to run my business."

That is the message from Alton Towers and the British Hospitality Association. Time and again, leaders in the industry, who are creating the jobs that are necessary for future generations, say that they do not want the regulation, interference and burdens that are the only recipe offered by the Labour party. The other day,

Sir Terence Conran said that London was the culinary centre of the world. The Labour party's recipe would be poison to the industry.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Does the Secretary of State accept that, if our tourism industry is to be fully competitive, visitors must be able to inform themselves of the history of the areas in which they find themselves? Does she agree that the "Victoria County History" is one of the great undertakings of British scholarship? Is she aware, however, that in many counties the project is limping along or is in abeyance for lack of funds? Will she ensure, therefore, that the National Heritage Bill is amended to make it clear that the "Victoria County History" will be eligible to receive lottery funds distributed by the national heritage memorial fund?

Mrs. Bottomley: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point and will examine it in detail. We have been modifying heritage legislation to ensure that, as with arts and sport, we can fund education, access, participation and young people, as well as old buildings and the support structure. I will certainly consider that matter.

Midweek Lottery Draw

12. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the impact on betting turnover of the second weekly national lottery draw. [2845]

Mr. Sproat: No such assessment has been made. It was for the Director General of the National Lottery to decide whether to allow a midweek draw, and the impact of the draw on betting turnover was not a consideration that he was able to take into account.

Mr. Spring: My hon. Friend will know of my commitment to the national lottery, but is he aware of its impact on betting turnover, with job losses and betting shop closures? Is he further aware of the impact of the anomaly in this country whereby punters can bet on the Irish lottery but not on our own? All that is having a severe effect on the viability of the horseracing industry, because the prize money is now wholly uncompetitive by international standards.

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point about the racing industry, which has an excellent champion in him. The Home Office is considering whether more deregulatory measures could be introduced to help the gaming industry.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

28. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what consultation he has had with the Law Society on the setting of priorities for legal aid support. [2863]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Gary Streeter): The Lord Chancellor and I have met the president and other members of the Law Society on several occasions in the past few months to discuss legal aid. We expect to have regular discussions as the reforms progress. I will soon start a programme of visits to local law societies to talk to practitioners about the reforms and how they will be implemented.

Mr. O'Brien: Does not the Law Society want a legal aid system that offers advice and assistance to people who pay their taxes? The way in which civil cases are attended to is a scandal. It cannot be right for people of modest means who work and pay taxes to be denied access to the legal system. People on pensions, who make contributions to legal aid, have to pay extra because of the length of time that it takes for cases to come to court. When will the Government make the system fairer and speed up the process of legal aid cases coming to court?

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman makes an important and interesting point; it is vital that we speed up access to justice, and that is one reason why the Government are implementing the Woolf reforms, which will make that access not only simpler and faster but cheaper. I am grateful to him for voicing support for our legal aid reforms; we are in discussion with the Law Society about them and it is perfectly proper and natural for the society to speak up for its members, but the Government will not be deflected from introducing the reforms at the earliest opportunity, to create a justice system of which we can all be proud.

Sir Dudley Smith: Is my hon. Friend aware that far too many people who are not entitled to it still get legal aid, especially the self-employed and those whom I would call wheeler-dealers, who have a great facility for pulling the wool over the eyes of officials and getting recompense for not only criminal but civil matters, as the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) said? That causes great resentment among those who feel that they should be entitled.

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend is quite right: too many weak, trivial and undeserving cases still slip through the net, which is why the Government are introducing radical reform. Tinkering with the system is not enough: we must control the budget, determine our national priorities and improve the merits test. We will do all those things, and we look forward to receiving the support of Opposition Members.

Woolf Report

29. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the current position with regard to the evaluation of the Woolf report; and if he will make a statement. [2864]

Mr. Streeter: On 31 October, I placed in the Library a copy of the Lord Chancellor's strategy for implementing Lord Woolf's recommendations. It proposes that the major elements of the reforms—the fast track, the multitrack and the new cost regime—will be in place by October 1998. The new civil procedure rules to underpin the changes will also be in place in time for implementation.

Mr. Llwyd: I thank the Minister for that answer. Can he please assure me that there will be no further cuts in

the availability of services in county court centres and trial centres in Wales? I have in mind in particular the Welsh language provision that is available in several county court centres; at present, we are on minimum cover, and any further cuts would be extremely damaging.

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. It is not expected that our reforms to civil procedures will threaten county courts in Wales. I assure him that the Woolf reforms will build on the proposals for Welsh language provision in the civil justice system. He has probably already seen the literature, not only in English but in Welsh, that my Department has produced on alternative dispute resolution.

Sir Donald Thompson: Many small magistrates courts in market towns have disappeared, which has taken away a cadre of solicitors that was important to those towns. Will the Woolf report be used to re-establish some of those local centres?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend is a champion of the interests of his constituents—now as he always has been. The Woolf reforms do not touch on the provision of magistrates courts. Decisions to close them are a matter for local magistrates courts committees, which always take soundings and enter into extensive consultation before taking any such decision.

Mr. Boateng: When will the Minister make public the costings of the Woolf report? What resources are to be applied to meeting its resource implications? Does he recognise that in the county courts, which will have to play a major part in its implementation, staff are being laid off and that there is widespread concern among district and county court judges? How can the country take his protestations seriously when ordinary people such as those mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) are not getting the justice to which they are entitled?

Mr. Streeter: I hope that the hon. Gentleman feels better now that he has got that off his chest. Every time he speaks, he appears to commit the Labour party to yet more spending. He may be assured that we will commit the resources necessary to implement the Woolf reforms. I also look to him to support the Civil Procedure Bill in due course.

Weymouth Land Registry

30. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a progress report on the rebuilding work at Weymouth land registry; and how many people are planned to be employed there in the forthcoming year. [2865]

Mr. Streeter: The new offices for Weymouth district land registry are in the final stages of construction and are on target and within budget. The main building was completed and occupied in July 1996; ancillary works are scheduled for completion by February 1997. The Weymouth district land registry employs 454 people and there are no plans to increase that number. The new building at Weymouth was necessary to replace temporary accommodation and not to facilitate expansion.

Mr. Bruce: May I put on record my thanks and that of my constituents for the investment made by the Government in continuing to have the land registry and for ensuring that our excellent headquarters has been provided? How much money has been invested in the new headquarters? Is there any sign that house sales are starting to move and that the volume of registrations going through the land registry is increasing?

Mr. Streeter: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, whose efforts helped to bring about that building programme. He will be pleased to learn that we have so far spent more than £7.8 million on the project, which is continuing. There is clear evidence from land registry data of improvement in the housing market. The volume of registrations is increasing this year by more than 6 per cent. and there has been an average rise of 5 per cent. in prices over the first three quarters of 1996. That is good news for home owners and for the economy.

Departmental Accountability

31. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what new proposals he has to improve the accountability to Parliament of his Department. [2866]

Mr. Streeter: The Lord Chancellor's Department is, and will remain, properly accountable to Parliament through its Ministers. The Government's response to the Public Service Select Committee's report on ministerial accountability and responsibility was published on 7 November.

Mr. Flynn: How is the Lord Chancellor accountable for the magistrates court changes? He said that he wanted to make them by consensus and the Minister said that he had taken wide soundings. Does he realise that those soundings have not included hon. Members? In one part of Wales, which occupies a quarter of the land mass of Wales, there will be only four courts left. My hon. Friend the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) had to write in to get his copy of the report. Is it not wrong that the House should not be fully consulted on changes that will reduce the service provided by magistrates courts throughout Wales?

Mr. Streeter: As I have said, the closure of magistrates courts is a matter for magistrates courts committees, which are made up of lay justices in each community. When a decision is made to close a magistrates court, there is, however, a right of appeal by the local paying authority. We get involved at that stage. I have already seen members of the hon. Gentleman's party and other Members representing the Principality who are concerned about the closure of magistrates courts in their constituencies. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to avail himself of the same facility, I will be delighted to see him—my door is always open.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the much improved accountability between his Department and Members of Parliament that I have witnessed in the past few years. In particular, I congratulate him on his Department's willingness to meet hon. Members to discuss not only constituency problems but wider ones. Problems of law are extremely complicated, and would my hon. Friend please bear in mind that the more his Department

can circulate its proposals and thoughts on any particular issue in "Dear colleague" letters or any other form, the clearer we will be about the future of the legal system and the more able to support it from both sides of the House?

Mr. Streeter: I am grateful for my hon. and learned Friend's kind words about our attempts to communicate and consult with Members of the House. We will of course continue to do that. We are always particularly keen to learn from hon. Members who have relevant experience, and my hon. and learned Friend comes into that category.

Departmental Agencies

32. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many representations he received in the last parliamentary Session from hon. Members that were forwarded for answer to the agencies attached to his Department. [2868]

Mr. Streeter: In the last parliamentary Session, 642 representations from hon. Members were forwarded for answer to the agencies for which the Lord Chancellor is responsible.

Mr. Barnes: Quite correctly, Members of Parliament are not allowed to approach the courts, as that would represent interference in the operation of law and order. Traditionally they could approach the Lord Chancellor, but now in hundreds of cases it seems that many of our queries are being passed to the Court Service. Surely that suggests that that is one area at least in which the agency arrangements go too far. Our constituents expect us to be able to approach the top—the Lord Chancellor—in connection with court cases and get a response from him.

Mr. Streeter: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. There has been no change in ministerial accountability and responsibility to the House. In my opinion, it is quite correct that letters about specific court cases should be sent by the person with the day-to-day management responsibility—the chief executive of the Court Service. The hon. Gentleman has been a Member for nine years and surely he knows by now that, if he is unhappy with a response from the agencies, he can contact Ministers at any time. Once again I find myself saying to a Labour Member that my door is always open.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Would my hon. Friend agree to accept representations on the activities of judges? Is he aware of increasing concern in the House that judges are getting involved in political matters in judgments where they seem to be making up the law as they go along? Is he aware of a recent case in which a judge appeared on a television programme to campaign against my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary's legislation? Does he agree that that is beyond the remit of a judge, who should be answerable to Parliament through the laws that we pass?

Mr. Streeter: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his timing. He makes an important point, because it is for Members of the House to legislate and it is for the judiciary to implement the law of the land. However, we welcome a lively debate, including the involvement of members of the judiciary, and we do not seek to stifle debate within our party, as, sadly, Labour Members have done in their own party in the past three years.

Law Centres

34. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has for the future of law centres. [2870]

Mr. Streeter: I have no specific plans on the future of law centres, which are independent and are funded from a variety of sources. On legal aid, it will be open to centres to bid for contracts of the kind proposed in the recent White Paper, "Striking the Balance", to provide legal services in their areas of expertise.

Mr. Booth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that helpful reply. Before I ask my question, I should declare an interest because I used to give regular free legal advice at a free legal advice centre. May I ask the Minister to commend the work of free legal advice centres and law centres, to do all he can to expand their work and to receive representations as to how that might be achieved?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend is quite right to say that law centres are an important part of the provision of legal advice in this country, but we do not propose to expand dramatically the number of law centres in this country, as the Labour party proposes to do. That would take millions of pounds away from high-street and family solicitors and would be a further charge on the taxpayer. We have no plans to introduce such a policy.

Legal Aid

35. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent representations he has received about legal aid. [2871]

Mr. Streeter: I frequently receive representation on this matter from professional bodies and associations, pressure groups, advice services, individual solicitors and advocates and members of the public. I have been pleased with the level of public support for our White Paper proposals.

Mr. Marshall: May I suggest to my hon. Friend that he reads *The Mail on Sunday* and the article by Mr. Peter Dobbie, which highlighted a case that is funded through legal aid in which the litigants and the defendants seem to be citizens of a country other than the United Kingdom and are not appearing in court themselves? Does he realise that a raft of money is being wasted on legal aid and that most of us believe that the legal aid system is out of all financial control? The sooner his reforms come into effect, the better.

Mr. Streeter: No Sunday is complete without *The Mail on Sunday* and, of course, there has been a spate of recent cases reported in the newspapers confirming that we are on the right track with our White Paper proposals; that there are still too many weak, trivial and undeserving cases being provided with legal aid in this country; and that a budget of £1.4 billion, which is rising at a rate of 10 per cent. per annum, is far too high. My hon. Friend is right to make the point that we must proceed with our legal aid reforms, and that is what we are doing.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I raise a point of order that is really a question about the moral or actual authority of you as Speaker in requiring the Government to make a statement before and not after British troops are irrevocably committed to a certain situation?

Since last Thursday, there has been a dramatic change in the circumstances in Zaire. I can understand that the Government may not have wanted to make a statement today and that they may have wanted to withhold a statement until such time as Brigadier Jonathan Thompson and his colleagues in the reconnaissance group return and report; but could we have some kind of undertaking that the House of Commons will be consulted after Brigadier Thompson has returned, but before there is any final decision to commit British forces to a situation about which—as became clear on Thursday—many hon. Members on both sides of the House are extremely anxious?

Furthermore, should not there have been some statement on the allegations that a British firm was involved in arms exports, absolutely transgressing every regulation that the House has laid down?

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman and the House know, I have no authority to compel a Minister to come to the Dispatch Box and to make a statement, but I am as keen to have information on this matter as any other hon. Member. I understand that the reconnaissance force will not be returning until either very late tonight or the early hours of tomorrow morning. I should have thought it right, proper and sensible that a thorough debriefing takes place and a report is made before a statement—an accurate statement—is made to the House. Hon. Members can be assured that I shall watch the matter very carefully—in fact, hour by hour.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware that there are very strict rules on access by strangers to the House of Commons. Are there no rules on access to the House of Commons that would prevent strange millionaires from turning up at the Leader of the Opposition's office with thousands of pounds in brown paper envelopes and leaving those brown paper envelopes in that office?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman paints a very colourful and hypothetical picture.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. On Friday, the management of the Benefits Agency announced the wholesale closure of agency offices in Wales. Those wholesale closures will lead to agency office staff losing their jobs and the public losing their service. Do you know whether the Secretary of State for Social Security has made an application to make a statement to the House? If not, what pressure can be exerted to prevail upon him to make such a statement?

Madam Speaker: No Minister has let me know that he or she is seeking to make a statement on the matter. The hon. Gentleman might try to make use of the Order Paper, or submit a private notice question or make an application under Standing Order No. 20 for my consideration. The hon. Gentleman is a senior parliamentarian who has been in the House for a long time, and he must know how to make use of the Order Paper by now.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I should be grateful if you could study the *Official Report* of Friday's sitting in the House when there were clear signs that Back-Bench Conservative Members were being directly briefed by civil servants who were present. As you know, that is contrary to our normal rules. Under normal circumstances I would not choose to raise the subject with you on the Floor of the House, but as Ministers were asked for an explanation during that Sitting and none was forthcoming, I hope that you will take a little time to consider what happened and perhaps rule on it at a future date.

Madam Speaker: I was not aware of what took place on Friday—it has just been drawn to my attention. My deputy dealt with the matter at the time, but I shall study the *Hansard* report carefully and make inquiries. I call Mr. Cohen.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton) *rose—*

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I called Mr. Cohen. He is small in stature, but he packs a lot of personality.

Mr. Cohen: I am lost for words, Madam Speaker—[HON. MEMBERS: "Good!"] But not that lost for words.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) raised a point of order in which he referred to the news that a company, Mil-Tec, supplied arms to Rwanda and considerably worsened the conflict two years ago—surely the House should consider that issue. I hear what you said, Madam Speaker, about the fact that you could not order Ministers to make statements on issues of such importance, but Customs and Excise has made a peculiar statement in response to today's news about the breach of the United Nations embargo and of United Kingdom law. It said that it might consider investigating the subject if it was appropriate. Surely the House can call officials to the Bar of the House so that we can question them on important matters. Is there a procedure under which we can call Customs and Excise officers to the Bar of the House to ask them properly to investigate the breach of the United Nations embargo?

Madam Speaker: I do not think that we need to proceed in that way. The House, particularly the Treasury Front-Bench team, are well aware of the feelings of the House on the matter.

Mr. Corbyn: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. While the House understands the reply that you gave my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), there is enormous public concern about the issue of illegal arms sales to the desperate conflict in Rwanda and eastern Zaire and the allegations that those arms have been exported to Zaire illegally, via offshore islands around this country, under the cloak of secrecy.

Although we are awaiting a statement on the deployment of British troops, you will understand that many people are frightened about the immorality of the arms trade and the use of those arms to kill thousands of innocent people in a desperate conflict that needs a resolution. Surely we have a part to play if we have allowed arms from this country to go to that area.

Madam Speaker: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will use his own Front Bench and the usual channels in order to press the Government for a statement. That is what he is seeking on that matter.

Firearms (Amendment) Bill [*Money*]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any administrative expenses incurred by the Secretary of State which are attributable to that Act;

(2) the payment out of money so provided of any sums required by the Secretary of State for paying compensation in respect of—

(a) property which is surrendered or forfeited under that Act; or

(b) any other loss which may be incurred as a result of that Act; and

(3) the payment into the Consolidated Fund of any sums received under that Act by the Secretary of State.—[*Mr. Howard.*]

3.39 pm

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): I am glad to have an opportunity to speak briefly about the money resolution—an opportunity that we would not have had if the motion had been taken immediately after the Bill's Second Reading last week. I declare an interest as president of the Worthing and West Sussex shooting club, an office which I have held—totally unremunerated—for many years.

It is very important that we should debate the money resolution, because it has a significant impact on the scope for amendments that may follow. I shall therefore concentrate on the money resolution.

I make one point by way of background. In my view, although we must all have great sympathy for the victims of the Dunblane massacre, these proposals are unlikely to have a significant impact in reducing the probability of a similar tragedy occurring in future. Indeed, in my view, the proposal may prove to be counter-productive because, if I read the Cullen report correctly, the problem is not so much the current law as the way in which it has been administered; the resignation of a senior police officer bears witness to that.

If we are to drive these matters underground, and if there still are fanatical gun maniacs—I fear that there may be—they may find it more attractive to buy weapons illegally than buying them under the previous arrangements, so we may receive no warning whatsoever of a tragedy similar to that which occurred in Dunblane, whereas, reflecting on the history, perhaps we should have taken more careful note of warnings that were given in the case of Hamilton.

At all events, we shall seriously affect many of our constituents, who engage in what has always been regarded as a perfectly reputable and sensible sport. That being so, the House should pay close attention to compensating those who suffer as a result of the legislation, whatever view one may take on the overall issue.

I very much welcome, therefore, the change that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has made in the money resolution, but I want to be sure that I have understood it correctly. When we debated the matter last week, it was clear that compensation would be provided for those who were giving up firearms that would become illegal under the legislation. My right hon. and learned Friend went further; he said that he

[Sir Terence Higgins]

understood the points that were made about equipment, which may be very expensive and which would no longer be of any use to its owners. But several of my right hon. and hon. Friends, as well as Opposition Members, strongly emphasised the case of those who, as a result of the legislation, will lose their jobs or suffer severe financial strain, perhaps having mortgaged their homes to set up in business or establish a shooting range or whatever.

If I understand the amended resolution correctly, under clause 2(b) it would now be possible to move amendments to cover

"any other loss which may be incurred as a result of"

the Act—that is, over and above property which is surrendered or forfeited under the Act. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary can confirm that that is so, and that it will now be possible to move amendments, for example to clause 11, which would enable us to make provision to compensate people in all the circumstances that I have described.

This is a matter of very great importance because, as I understand it, it would affect not only the amendments that could be moved in the House but those that could be moved in the other place—and no doubt their Lordships also will wish to debate those matters. I should be grateful if my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary would confirm what I have just described.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Is it my right hon. Friend's understanding that the money resolution implies that the Government would be prepared to pay compensation for loss of trade—this is a crucial point—rather than just for guns?

Sir Terence Higgins: As I understand it, the resolution covers any loss, other than guns and property forfeited, which may be incurred under the Bill. It is an important point if we are to deal fairly with those affected by the Bill. However, it will have a significant effect on public expenditure. No doubt we will want to debate that when we reach the appropriate clauses.

I find it surprising that, apparently, Treasury Ministers in the Cabinet must have agreed to the proposals, which are potentially very expensive. As a number of hon. Members pointed out in our debate last week, the money could be better spent on other things—for example, the police. We need to be clear about the position. In particular, we must take note of the fact that, if the Government were simply to accept the Cullen recommendations—which, in my view, would be equally effective, in that equipment would be dismantled and the parts kept in separate places—the cost of the Bill would be significantly less than it is currently likely to be. It is important that the Treasury should carefully consider whether the Government's view that they should go beyond Cullen was the most appropriate decision in the circumstances.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way so generously. Does he agree that it is important that we get a clear statement? The Bill is going through at a rapid pace and it will be impossible to unpick.

Sir Terence Higgins: I agree very much with my hon. Friend. The whole matter has been rushed—indeed, we will reach the guillotine motion a little later. I do not understand why it is necessary to legislate in such haste.

I want to make a final point on the narrow issue of compensation. I am worried about the provision of clause 11, which states that compensation will be in accordance

"with a scheme made by him"—

that is, the Home Secretary. Surely in legislation of this sort any scheme involving large sums of public money—it has been conceded already that it is more than £100 million—should be subject to a resolution of the House. It is extraordinary that the Home Secretary should propose—I might almost say, presume—to spend public money on a scheme made by him rather than one approved by the House.

Having said that, all those on either side of the basic argument about firearms control should welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals—but we want an assurance that, if we wish to amend the Bill during its later stages in the way that I have suggested, that will be possible.

3.47 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): As I made clear in the Second Reading debate last Tuesday, it is appropriate that compensation should be paid to those private individuals who have to give up their weapons, which, until the Bill becomes law, they have held lawfully under arrangements previously agreed by Parliament. We therefore support the money resolution.

Whether the Government's proposed scheme for an 80 per cent. ban on handguns goes through, or the alternative 100 per cent. ban—which we support—it is that huge majority of decent, law-abiding handgun owners who will be seriously affected by the Bill. Their sense of grievance, which we all understand, would be all the greater if no compensation were to be offered.

Of course, no compensation of any sort was offered when a previous Home Secretary—the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd)—made his original proposals in the December 1987 White Paper, "Firearms Act 1968: Proposals for Reform", which followed the atrocity at Hungerford. In that White Paper the Government were emphatic in what they said:

"We have concluded that as a matter of principle it is undesirable and unjust to require the taxpayer at large to pay for the removal from the public domain of weapons which are an acknowledged threat to life."

Significantly, the White Paper went on state:

"Although there will be no market for prohibited weapons in this country, authorised dealers will still be able to export them abroad, and owners will be able to recover some of the value in this way."

Given today's revelations in *The Times* about a wholly unacceptable arms trade between British-based companies and rebel forces in Rwanda, I think that we can all appreciate the fact that a payment by the Government would be far preferable to allowing 160,000 to 200,000 handguns to be sent abroad to who knows where.

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): The hon. Gentleman mentioned the compensation situation in 1988,

and, to the Opposition's credit, in Committee on the Firearms (Amendment) Bill that year, they insisted during the debate on the sittings motion that proper compensation was payable. May I take it from what he said that he will support the proposition that compensation should be paid to anyone who is affected by the Bill—to include dealers, manufacturers and others—whom the Home Secretary has said he will not compensate?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Yes—in the same way as the Government compensated miners.

Mr. Straw: I was planning to deal with that point. I said that we support the money resolution and, as I said in last Tuesday's debate, that we are willing to consider proposals other than those currently on the table. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will understand if I do not offer him a blank cheque before I see the proposition.

The point about the possible export of weapons that are handed in is very important. As I said, one of the many defects in the original proposal by the right hon. Member for Witney in December 1987 was that he said that former rifle owners could receive compensation by selling their weapons abroad. I think that all hon. Members believe that that is unacceptable. After the Bill becomes law, at least 160,000, and perhaps 200,000, weapons will be surrendered on payment of compensation to the police and the Government.

I should be grateful if the Secretary of State would give us an undertaking that the weapons surrendered will be destroyed or that they will not be exported by the Government without the clearest guarantees about the acceptability of the end user. In no circumstances, however, should those weapons be used for internal or external repression. I hope that he will give those undertakings in his reply.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) made a sedentary intervention about compensation paid to miners who lost their jobs in the rundown of the coal industry. Does the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) agree that if dealers, who currently will receive no compensation, were to receive anything like the compensation paid to miners, they would be more than satisfied? Does he also agree that the figure of £25 million to £50 million provided in the resolution is lamentably short of what will be required if one considers the valuation of firearms and of pistol shooters' equipment—which, luckily, is now being included in the compensation terms provided for by the Home Office?

Mr. Straw: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me for a moment, I shall deal with the first issue that he mentioned. On his second point, I look forward to hearing any details that the Secretary of State may offer about the calculations.

I am glad to see the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South–West (Mr. Budgen) in the Chamber. During the debate on the Loyal Address, he mentioned the

"possibility that the judges of the European Court of Human Rights may oblige the British taxpayer to provide compensation on a much wider basis".—[*Official Report*, 7 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. 1350.]

As I said last week when he was not in the Chamber, we are very glad to have his full support for the European convention on human rights. I should tell him that the rights that he feels he has under the convention—which of course has nothing to do with the European Union—would be far easier to adjudicate upon if the European convention were incorporated into British law. After the next election, when we endeavour to do just that, I hope that we will have his full support.

As the hon. Member for Weston–super–Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) pointed out, in the end the right hon. Member for Witney did agree a compensation scheme, although the right hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), who was then his Minister of State, went out of his way to say that it was not to be seen as a precedent.

I mention this background because, although I certainly understand the sense of grievance among many handgun owners, they are now, under this money resolution, likely to be treated in a relatively generous way compared with others in a similar position. It is worth our bearing in mind the fact that many people whose private property is specifically affected by decisions agreed or approved by the House are not compensated at all. That is simply a fact.

Turner and Newall traded in asbestos and had no interest in running anything other than a lawful trade. It was discovered that the product was causing injury and death and it was decided that the firm could no longer produce it, but, as far as I know, it received no compensation. Nor did the manufacturers of foam-filled furniture, which turned out to be inflammable and therefore dangerous. Nor do the manufacturers of drugs that may have passed various tests and are thus approved but which are subsequently taken off the market.

Very different principles apply to the compensating of private individuals and the compensating of businesses. If we decide to compensate whole businesses, it will have huge implications for the public purse—implications that the House needs to consider other than during a debate on firearms.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): My hon. Friend is absolutely right to mention the danger of underestimating the enormous possible cost of compensating too widely or too generously. Is he aware that there is an even better parallel for non-compensation—the plight of the many British beef farmers who have been pushed to near-bankruptcy? Government action has almost destroyed the industry in which some of my constituents work.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend makes an important point.

Even where the private interest of constituents is directly affected by a decision made or approved by the House—for example, a decision on a road scheme—there is not necessarily a direct right to compensation. I have two such cases in my constituency at the moment. One involves individuals living close to the M65. The Department of Transport entirely accepts that the value of their homes has been reduced by more than 15 per cent. but they are to receive no compensation. The other involves the owners of a public house whose trade was reduced to virtually nothing because of a road scheme which meant that no one could reach the public house for six months. They, too, are to receive no compensation whatever.

We are today considering the compensation payable to the holders of guns. Eighteen months ago, the House was considering the far more serious Government proposals

[Mr. Straw]

to cut compensation to the victims of criminal injuries, including those injured by guns. It is a very great shame that the Tory Back Benchers who are so vocal in calling for more compensation for the owners of guns were wholly silent in May last year when we were discussing compensation for the victims of users of guns. Had they been as vocal then as they are today, a far better scheme for compensating the victims of gun injuries and deaths might have been agreed by the House.

3.58 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I should like to add a few words to what my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) said, but I must first point out that the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) is wholly wrong. The Government have—rightly—provided about £500 million to help farmers and the meat trade as a whole. I am glad that farmers have received that income.

As for the money resolution, I want to put a few suggestions to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State to try to ease the pain felt by many pistol and revolver shooters relative to the valuation of their weapons. Will he give us his thoughts on how the scheme will proceed? Should the Bill become an Act at the end of the year or in January, will everyone have to take all their weapons to a police station on that very day? I suspect that the police stations would be swamped with weapons. We cannot have people queuing down the street with firearms waiting to hand them in.

Are the police to take the details at that stage? When will the valuation take place? Who will do the valuation? The valuation of arms and weapons is a specialised business. It is important to have some idea of how the valuation is to be carried out. If it takes place some months after the handing-in date, will the owner of the weapons be allowed to be present at the time of the valuation and discuss it with whoever is doing the valuation?

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), I am glad that the Government have had second thoughts about the money resolution. It now seems that they will be a little more helpful to those who have to hand in their weapons. However, bearing in mind the fact that one reads in the papers of guns being valued at an average of £400, has my right hon. and learned Friend allowed for sufficient money? That average figure may be on the high side, although some weapons, particularly the rare and valuable ones, will inevitably be worth a great deal more.

I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will also think about gun clubs. I am thinking not of commercial rifle and pistol clubs which try to make money, but of those many private clubs at which members have scraped money together to make a secure shooting range. They may have only a dozen or 20 members, who shoot only occasionally. They will feel that all their efforts are wasted and will receive no compensation for the significant amount of money that they will lose.

We may cover the issue in more detail when we consider the specific provisions of the Bill, but will my right hon. and learned Friend give a little more information on Olympic and Commonwealth games weapons and their valuation? I went to the Commonwealth games in Victoria, in British Columbia, and saw immaculately run ranges and high-quality pistol and rifle shooting. Has my right hon. and learned Friend given second thoughts to the Commonwealth games? I appreciate that only .22 pistols are used in the Olympics, but the Commonwealth games has always featured larger calibre pistols as well as .22 pistols and airguns. The Bill might make the shooting competitions at the Manchester Commonwealth games impossible. Those who have international shooting weapons will want to know where they stand on valuation.

All in all, I am glad that my right hon. and learned Friend has listened to those of us who have talked to him about valuation. I hope that he will be able to give us more information when he winds up, so that we can tell those hundreds of people who have written to us how things will work out.

4.2 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I should like to follow the lead given by the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), who opened this debate on the money resolution, which has raised some significant issues. I, too, start by acknowledging the fact that the Government have paid attention to the criticisms levelled at the original money resolution. We are grateful for that, because it gives us a chance to discuss some of the issues that we had feared we would not be able to raise.

I am bewildered by the comments of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) on the effects on businesses and those who do not count as individuals. In my constituency—I know that this will be mirrored in the constituencies of many hon. Members on both sides—there are manufacturers with small, specialist and highly developed businesses. Many have big export potential, but many also produce rifles, handguns and handgun barrels—a particular concern in my constituency—for the domestic market. Businesses big and small, as well as dealers, and those who have erected ranges suitable for handguns, have expended large sums on the facilities that they required for the previously legitimate activities of gun clubs. They will all find themselves out of pocket as a result of the Bill.

I have also had some pretty robust representations from people who have invested heavily in putting equipment into their homes for the security of their handguns. All those different categories should be considered properly in Committee. The Government are wrong if, as I understand it, they are setting their face against providing adequate and sensible compensation for companies, individuals, clubs and others who will be indirectly affected and who may suffer a significant loss or who may lose their livelihood as a result of the Bill.

Some individuals will still be able to hold .22 handguns, but they will be worth less. They will suffer loss as a result of the Bill, and they should be given fairer consideration as well.

I should like the Government to confirm the amounts quoted in the explanatory memorandum, which mentions sums of £25 million to £50 million. Those figures are, of course, not part of the legislation and are not prescriptive. They are current estimates and I should like the Government to confirm that if, as a result of further deliberation and better consideration, the House or the

Committee decides that the compensation schemes must be extended and that the finance necessary to pay for them must be increased, that decision will not be constrained by the fact that the explanatory memorandum refers to the financial effects as being between £25 million and £50 million.

I share the views expressed by other hon. Members. The financial effects are an extremely important part of the Bill. The Government's changes have been welcome as far as they go, but they do not yet go far enough. I and the majority of my colleagues want the compensation regime to be extended far beyond individuals so that it embraces anyone who has, directly or indirectly, suffered capital or revenue loss as a result of the Bill.

4.7 pm

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston–super–Mare): I have little to add to what I said last week in opposing the Second Reading of the Bill. I strongly agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) that generous compensation will help to allay the deep feeling of injustice that law-abiding people who enjoy shooting, under licence of the law, feel at having their sport prohibited by Act of Parliament.

Not the least of my objections to the Bill is the speed with which it is being indecently dragged through the House. We shall debate the timetable on the next motion; I will confine my remarks to the money resolution. Very strong protests were made last week about the narrowness of the money resolution, which, as originally drafted, would have precluded proper debate of those whose livelihoods, businesses, investment and wealth are associated with the sport of shooting.

I appeal to Labour Members to show a sense of justice. I did not get a satisfactory answer from the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). Whether they are in favour of handguns or not, do hon. Members believe that it is right for us to take away people's money, people's investments and people's livelihoods by Act of Parliament without fair compensation?

I welcome strongly my right hon. and learned Friend's response to our criticism and I am grateful to him for tabling a much wider money resolution so that we can debate the issues in Committee.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On the narrow point of fair compensation, who will carry out the assessment of compensation? The right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) made a valid point: there are compensators and compensators, and valuers and valuers.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: If the hon. Gentleman reads the Bill with care, he will find that the matter is covered by clause 11. I share his view and that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries that a proper arrangement that is seen to be fair and transparent should be established.

Although there is much talk about such matters, on the most recent occasion, total compensation amounted to a mere £625,000. However, I understand that there are still some outstanding cases, so one views with considerable suspicion the attitude of the Treasury to such matters.

In common justice, the House must not oppress individuals by passing laws that deprive them of their livelihoods without offering proper compensation. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will deal with that point in his reply to the debate.

4.10 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): For the avoidance of doubt, let me begin by taking the opportunity to declare that I hold a shotgun certificate.

The money resolution replaces that which was tabled with the Bill and which would have limited debate on compensation matters to the provisions in clause 11. Clause 11 requires the Government to establish a scheme to make payments to persons who surrender firearms to a chief officer of police when the possession of those firearms will become unlawful by virtue of the provisions of clause 1.

As I announced on Second Reading, since the Bill was published the Government have received further legal advice as to their obligation to pay compensation. It was made clear to us not only that we had an obligation to pay for handguns that would become unlawful, but that our obligations would extend to firearms certificate holders who owned accessories that had no other use except in connection with those guns. In those circumstances, it is clear that the owner will have lost all the essential fruits of ownership of such accessories and must be compensated. It was clear that the money resolution would have to be revised to accommodate such accessories, so we did not move the earlier resolution.

The revised resolution before the House will allow the Government to pay compensation for accessories as well as guns. It will also allow hon. Members to raise wider questions on compensation that they believe should be the subject of debate.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South–West): My right hon. and learned Friend talks about the Government's obligation to pay compensation. Under our constitution there is no written obligation to do anything other than as a result of those constraints that we have allowed to be imposed on us by the European convention on human rights. Is my right hon. and learned Friend saying that he concedes that, if compensation is not paid according to the criteria of that convention, the Government and whoever succeeds them will be at risk of having claims brought against them in that court?

Mr. Howard: Clearly, it will be open to anyone to bring a case to that court. My hon. Friend is entirely right in assuming that, when I referred to obligations to pay compensation, I had in mind the provisions of the convention and the way in which they are likely to be interpreted. So I agree with my hon. Friend.

Sir Cranley Onslow (Woking): Am I right to assume that the reworded money resolution would enable my right hon. and learned Friend to establish a scheme at least as generous as that provided by the Australian Government?

Mr. Howard: I hesitate to give a simple and categorical answer to that question because I do not pretend to have any expertise in respect of the Australian scheme. I have made some preliminary inquiries about the scope of that scheme, which lead me to believe that the answer to my right hon. Friend's question is yes.

[Mr. Howard]

However, I hope that he will not hold me to the details of that if further examination proves the truth to be somewhat different.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): For the avoidance of doubt, will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that what he has already told the House allows us at some future stage to bring forward the prospect of compensating clubs, retailers, wholesalers and manufacturers for their consequential losses?

Mr. Howard: Amendments to that effect would be in order. As my hon. Friend will be aware, I have previously indicated what the Government's view would be and I shall proceed to explain it in a little further detail in due course. The answer to his question is yes: amendments to that effect would be in order—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I hate to correct the Home Secretary but it is not for him to decide whether amendments are in order. It is for him to decide whether to accept amendments that are in order.

Mr. Howard: I unreservedly apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and entirely accept that rebuke. The Government's purpose in tabling this revised money resolution is to ease the path of the Chair towards finding such amendments within the Bill's scope and in order.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Subject to the view of the Chair, is it my right hon. and learned Friend's opinion that this new money resolution would allow the House to debate an amendment to compensate the owners of .22 calibre pistols, who will have to surrender and forfeit their pistols because they do not have access to secure gun-club premises?

Mr. Howard: Subject to any rulings from the Chair, I believe that such an amendment would be in order.

I am well aware from representations that have been made to me both in the House and outside of hon. Members' concerns on the matter. It is right, therefore, that there should be an opportunity to raise those concerns in Committee and on Report, and the resolution will allow that.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): As the Home Secretary knows, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) made it clear that we support the money resolution. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree, however, that our sympathy would be strained if the Sportsman's Association of Great Britain continued to distribute leaflets such as the one that it distributed at Eglinton hunt in Ayrshire this weekend, which describes the Dunblane parents as

"a noisy hysterical group of social terrorists"?

The owners of handguns and the association will lose the sympathy of the Opposition and other hon. Members as a result of such leaflets.

Mr. Howard: I prefer not to comment on leaflets that I have not seen, and I have not seen the leaflet to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

I do not believe that it would be right at the moment to go into the substance of all the questions that could be raised—and, indeed, have to some extent been raised—by my hon. Friends. There will be ample opportunity to debate those matters extensively at the appropriate moment. I indicated the Government's position on this question on Second Reading. Although that position has not changed, I am confident that the money resolution will enable the Chair to permit full debates to take place.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): This new money resolution has obviously been decided at the very highest level and the Treasury has obviously been involved. In contingency terms, will my right hon. and learned Friend tell the House roughly how much it is likely to cost?

Mr. Howard: I cannot do that because the money resolution as such does not actually cost any money. As I have been endeavouring to explain, the money resolution makes it easier for the Chair to permit amendments to be tabled which, subject to the will of the House, will have the effect of deciding what compensation provisions ultimately find their way into the Bill. The money resolution as such does no more than permit debate to take place. The original money resolution was restricted in that context; this one is wider in that context.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Will the Home Secretary give us a categorical assurance that if we support him tonight, the confiscated guns will not be sent to the killing fields in Africa?

Mr. Howard: That matter is not covered by the money resolution and it can be extensively debated in due course. If it is appropriate to give any assurances at that stage, those assurances can be given, but that will be the moment to deal with the matter and not now.

Mr. Straw: On that point, will the Home Secretary accept that it would provoke grave concern on both sides of the House if the weapons for which compensation was paid were to find their way into the general arms trade? It is incumbent on the Government to ensure that strict licensing regulations and arms export licences apply to any weapons that are sold which have been the subject of compensation.

Mr. Howard: I can see that there are important questions to be discussed and debated in that area, but it is not appropriate to rush to conclusions about them this afternoon and I do not intend to do so.

The position on the Government's attitude to compensation has not changed since the Second Reading debate, but the money resolution before the House will allow Madam Speaker to permit a full debate to take place, both about those who will be obliged to surrender property as a result of the Bill and about those who will suffer other losses.

4.20 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I am grateful that the Home Secretary sat down just four minutes before time is up, because that gives me a few

minutes to pose a series of questions. On the Select Committee on Home Affairs, I was against the retention of guns, but I have listened carefully in the past few months to the representations made to me. I understand those who are sportsmen and their need for sporting facilities and—although I will vote for a total gun ban later today—I understand the position of those who will support the Government in the retention of .22s but would also like to retain other guns.

I have always believed in the fundamental principle that one cannot confiscate without proper compensation. Therefore, I seek assurances from the Home Secretary because, if we end up with total confiscation, which is what we want, or partial confiscation, as in the Bill, it is not only the people who own guns who will lose. For example, the members of several little gun clubs, including some in my constituency—one in particular is owned and run by its members—have used their personal moneys to invest and develop their personal facilities. They have a right to compensation.

A fundamental principle lies behind the right to compensation and, far too often, the Government have taken over assets without proper compensation. Back in 1974, to take an extreme example, the Government took over the water boards, and local authorities were not properly compensated. At this stage in the 20th century, we have surely reached the point at which we properly compensate a person who, through no fault of his own, loses an asset because the state has decided that that is in the best public interest.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), I will support the money resolution, but I hope that we will not look narrowly at the question of compensation. It is not only the guns and their accessories that matter, but the facilities and those who run them. In many cases, they will be put out of business and they also have a right to compensation. I do not include the manufacturers, because they will have other outlets for their products, and the arms trade, regrettably, will continue.

I ask the Home Secretary not to be narrow-minded when he considers the matter, and to consider the generality not the particular. I hope that he will bring a sense of justice to bear on the question of compensation for those ordinary citizens who will lose not only their rights to what they consider to be a sport, but their rights to their assets and their pleasure, because the House decides that handguns should cease to exist in the greater interest and for the greater good. They should be compensated in total, not through the farce of 80 per cent. compensation.

Somebody mentioned earlier the European convention on human rights, which states—

It being three-quarters of an hour after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(b) (Money resolutions and Ways and Means resolutions in connection with Bills).*

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any administrative expenses incurred by the Secretary of State which are attributable to that Act;

(2) the payment out of money so provided of any sums required by the Secretary of State for paying compensation in respect of—

(a) property which is surrendered or forfeited under that Act; or

(b) any other loss which may be incurred as a result of that Act; and

(3) the payment into the Consolidated Fund of any sums received under that Act by the Secretary of State.

Firearms (Amendment) Bill (Allocation of Time)

4.24 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Bill:—

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE HOUSE

1.—(1) The proceedings in Committee of the whole House shall be completed in two allotted days and shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the second of those days.

(2) On the first allotted day—

(a) proceedings on any amendments to Clause No. 1 which may be selected and which would amend that Clause at any place before the words "a small-calibre pistol" at line 16 of page 1 of the Bill shall be brought to a conclusion one hour after the commencement of proceedings on the first such amendment;

(b) proceedings on any amendments to Clause No. 1 which may be selected and which would leave out the words "a small-calibre pistol" at line 16 of page 1 of the Bill shall be brought to a conclusion three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the first such amendment;

(c) proceedings on any other amendments to Clause No. 1 which may be selected shall be brought to a conclusion one hour after the commencement of proceedings on the first such amendment; and

(d) the remaining proceedings on Clause No. 1 shall be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

(3) No motion as to the order in which proceedings are to be considered in the Committee shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown and the Question on any such motion shall be put forthwith.

(4) When the Order of the Day is read for the House to resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill, the Speaker shall leave the Chair without putting any Question and the House shall resolve itself into a Committee forthwith whether or not notice of an Instruction to the Committee has been given; and Standing Order No. 64 (Committee of whole House on bill) shall not apply.

(5) Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings to which this paragraph applies on the first allotted day.

(6) Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) shall not apply in relation to the proceedings to which this paragraph applies.

STANDING COMMITTEE

2.—(1) The Standing Committee to which the remainder of the Bill is allocated shall report the Bill not later than 28th November.

(2) Proceedings at a sitting of the Standing Committee on 28th November may continue until Ten o'clock whether or not the House is adjourned before that time, and if the House is adjourned before those proceedings have been brought to a conclusion, the Standing Committee shall report the Bill to the House on 29th November.

REPORT

3.—(1) The proceedings on consideration shall be completed in one allotted day and shall be brought to a conclusion at midnight.

(2) Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to those proceedings.

THIRD READING

4.—(1) The proceedings on Third Reading shall be completed in one allotted day and shall be brought to a conclusion three hours after their commencement.

(2) Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to those proceedings.

BUSINESS COMMITTEE

5.—(1) For the purposes of Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) this Order shall be taken to allot to the proceedings on consideration of the Bill such part of the allotted day as the Resolution of the Business Committee may determine.

(2) The Business Committee shall report to the House its Resolution as to the proceedings on consideration, not later than the fourth day on which the House sits after the day on which the Chairman of the Standing Committee reports the Bill to the House.

(3) Any Resolution of the Business Committee may be varied by a further Report of the Committee under Standing Order No. 80, whether or not within the time specified in sub-paragraph (2) and whether or not that Resolution has been agreed to by the House.

(4) No Motion shall be made as to the order in which proceedings on consideration are taken, but the Resolutions of the Business Committee may include alterations in that order.

PROCEDURE IN STANDING COMMITTEE

6.—(1) At a sitting of the Standing Committee at which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion under a Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee, the Chairman shall not adjourn the Committee under any Order relating to the sittings of the Committee until those proceedings have been brought to a conclusion.

(2) No Motion shall be made in the Standing Committee relating to the sitting of the Committee except by a Minister of the Crown, and the Chairman shall permit a brief explanatory statement from the Member who moves, and from a Member who opposes, the Motion, and shall then put the Question thereon.

(3) No Motion shall be made as to the order in which proceedings are to be considered in the Standing Committee, but the Resolutions of the Business Sub-Committee may include alterations in that order.

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS IN COMMITTEE

7. On the conclusion of the proceedings in any Committee on the Bill, the Chairman shall report such of the Bill's provisions as were committed (or re-committed) to that Committee to the House without putting any Question.

DILATORY MOTIONS

8. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of proceedings on, the Bill shall be made in the Standing Committee or on an allotted day except by a Minister of the Crown, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

EXTRA TIME

9. If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) stands over from an earlier day, paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

10. Any private business which has been set down for consideration at Seven o'clock on an allotted day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business for a period of three hours from the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill or, if those proceedings are concluded before Ten o'clock, for a period equal to the time elapsing between Seven o'clock and the conclusion of those proceedings.

PROCEDURE AT TIME FOR CONCLUSION OF PROCEEDINGS

11. For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee or the Business Sub-Committee and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, the Chairman or the Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time, whether before the time so appointed or in pursuance of paragraph (a), the Question that the Clause or Schedule, or the Clause or Schedule as amended, be added to the Bill);

(c) the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper, whether in the name of a Minister of the Crown or not, which is moved or made by a Minister of the Crown;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a motion so made for a new Clause or new Schedule, the Chairman or the Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

12.—(1) Proceedings under paragraph 11 of this Order shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(2) If an allotted day is one on which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) would, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock—

(a) that Motion shall stand over until the conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion at or before that time;

(b) the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

(3) If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

SUPPLEMENTAL ORDERS

13.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made in the House by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order (including anything which might have been the subject of a report of the Business Committee or Business Sub-Committee) shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced.

(2) Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to those proceedings.

(3) If on an allotted day on which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before that time no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

SAVING

14. Nothing in this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee or Business Sub-Committee shall—

(a) prevent any proceedings to which the Order or Resolution applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by the Order or Resolution; or

(b) prevent any business (whether on the Bill or not) from being proceeded with on any day after the completion of all such proceedings on the Bill as are to be taken on that day.

RECOMMITTAL

15.—(1) References in this Order to proceedings on consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings at those stages respectively, for, on or in consequence of, recommittal.

(2) On an allotted day no debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and the Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

INTERPRETATION

16. In this Order—

"allotted day" means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the Day, provided that a Motion for allotting time to the proceedings on the Bill to be taken on that day either has been agreed on a previous day, or is set down for consideration on that day;

"Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee" means a Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee as agreed to by the Standing Committee;

"the Bill" means the Firearms (Amendment) Bill;

"Resolution of the Business Committee" means a Resolution of the Business Committee as agreed to by the House.

The Bill takes forward the Government's response to the dreadful events that took place eight months ago at Dunblane primary school. Last week, the House gave a Second Reading to the Bill. Later today, we will begin the detailed debate here on the Floor of the House of the first five clauses, concerning the banning of high-calibre handguns.

It is the duty of this House to give the highest priority to those matters that directly affect the safety and protection of the public. If ever there was such a matter, it is this Bill. Because of the importance of its subject matter, the House has agreed that its first five clauses should be considered by a Committee of the whole House. The allocation of time order allows two days for this, and provides that the proceedings shall be brought to a conclusion at 10 o'clock on the second day.

Hon. Members from all parties have an interest in these provisions, and the order that we are discussing allows a very full debate on them. The order allows six hours in total for the debates on clause 1. That is a substantial amount of time, and I am confident that it will enable hon. Members on both sides of the House to make their points effectively.

Within that period, the order allows three hours for discussion on any amendments which may be selected and which would leave out the words "a small calibre pistol" at line 16 of page 1 of the Bill. Such an amendment—in the name of a number of hon. Members—has been tabled, and is supported by Opposition Front Benchers.

If that amendment were accepted, it would amend the Bill so as to introduce an almost complete ban on handguns of all calibers, rather than confining the ban to handguns above .22 inch calibre, as the Government propose. This is an important matter. It is the central issue of the disagreement between the Government and Opposition Front Benchers, and it is right that it should

[Mr. Michael Howard]

be fully debated on the Floor of the House. We believe that it is right that a substantial time should be allowed for that part of the debate.

The order would thereafter allow one hour for any further amendments on clause 1, and an hour for the debate on the question as to whether the Clause should stand part of the Bill. The order goes on to propose that the Standing Committee considering the Bill should report the Bill not later than 28 November, or 29 November in the event that proceedings in Standing Committee continue on 28 November after the House has adjourned.

The order provides for the proceedings on Report to be completed in one day and brought to a conclusion at midnight. It similarly provides that the proceedings on Third Reading shall be completed in one day and brought to a conclusion after three hours. The Government believe that the order will provide the opportunity for a full and detailed scrutiny of this legislation, while ensuring that it is dealt with with the urgency that this important subject requires.

4.27 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Between March 1974 and April 1979, 12 Bills were subject to guillotine motions, and I believe that each one was opposed by the then Conservative Opposition. Between May 1979 and the end of 1995, 59 Bills have been subject to guillotine motions, and each one, I believe, has been opposed by the Labour Opposition.

Last Tuesday, the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling)—who I am sorry is not in his place—stood up, admirably, for Back-Benchers' rights, and he was entirely correct to do so. Some of us remember that, between 1979 and 1983, the right hon. Gentleman was the Patronage Secretary and Chief Whip to the Government. During that period, he ensured the passage of 13 guillotine motions—one more than during the entire period of the previous Labour Government.

This motion is, as it were, the exception to the rule—for we support it. We gave clear undertakings that we would facilitate the passage through Parliament of firearms legislation, and we believe that this motion is necessary to ensure that the measure reaches the statute book by Christmas, or soon thereafter. If there is a Division, my right hon. and hon. Friends and myself will vote with the Government in the Aye Lobby. That vote, if it takes place, will be a whipped vote, not least because we think it essential that the House reaches a conclusion today on the key issue of a total or partial ban on handguns.

As far as the official Opposition are concerned, however, all the divisions on the merits of gun control will be free votes. I have listened with great care to Ministers trying to explain why a free vote on caning is justified, while a free vote on gun control is not. I must tell the Home Secretary and the Minister of State that the more I hear their arguments, the less I think of them. This is an issue that should be informed not by party belief or ideology but by the conscience and judgment of hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The only serious argument for the Government's decision to impose a whipped vote is the one that they cannot deploy in public—they know that on a free vote a clear majority would be in favour of a total ban on the use of handguns. By insisting on a whipped vote, the Government display remarkably little confidence in their own arguments. We want to get the timetable motion through as quickly as possible, so that, whatever happens in the Lobbies tonight, the public will be able to see who has in practice won the argument about the case for a total ban.

During the brief debate on the money resolution, some Conservative Members charged that today's debates were taking place in haste.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South–West): They are.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman says that they are, but we would not have agreed to a timetable motion in these unusual circumstances, in which the Opposition have co-operated with the Government in tabling the motion, if we thought that the matter were being dealt with in haste. The parents of Dunblane and the public could rightly criticise the House, not for dealing with the issue in haste, but for dealing with it too slowly. The atrocity in Dunblane took place on 13 March 1996. Lord Cullen's inquiry was established on 21 March 1996 and sat for 26 days from 29 May until 10 July, giving full consideration to a great many of the issues before the House.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): We are not implementing Cullen.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is right. As has been pointed out in previous debates, Lord Cullen said in the body of his report that he was making recommendations that should be considered by the House, and that it was exclusively for the Government and Parliament to decide what gun controls should be introduced. It was never suggested that the House would delegate its clear responsibilities for determining the laws of the land to an inquiry under Lord Cullen or any other distinguished or learned gentleman.

Sir Jim Spicer (West Dorset): My recollection of the debate and discussion that took place when Lord Cullen was invited to set up the inquiry is that there was general agreement on both sides of the House that no one would move until the inquiry had reported. Somewhere along the line, someone—the Opposition parties in particular—lost sight of that agreement, and came out with a decision in advance of the proposals.

Mr. Straw: I dealt with that point at some length in the debate last Tuesday. My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and I put our evidence to Lord Cullen as a result of our discussions with the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Home Secretary. We gave our evidence saying, for example, that there should be a total ban on handguns. We made that absolutely clear, but we also said that we would reserve our final judgment until we had seen the results of Lord Cullen's inquiry, which is exactly what we did.

The fact that such advice was not followed by the six Conservative Members of the Select Committee on Home Affairs remains a matter of the deepest regret to my right hon. and hon. Friends and myself. As the minutes made

clear, they had before them a resolution moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin)—a member of that Committee—to the effect that the Committee should not produce a report until after Lord Cullen had produced his report. I am sorry to say that, for their own reasons, the six Conservative members of the Select Committee decided to produce the report prematurely; partly as a result, a huge outcry arose against the recommendations, and the existing support for a total ban was increased.

Lord Cullen's inquiry reported to the Secretary of State for Scotland on 30 September. Since then, the report's recommendations and the issue of a total ban have been the subject of discussion in the House on three occasions—two statements on the inquiry on 16 October, the debate on the Loyal Address on 28 October and the debate on Second Reading on 7 November—and now there is today's debate. It could therefore not possibly be argued that the House has proceeded in haste on the issue.

Sometimes parallels are drawn, in a form of special pleading as to why the Government should not come to a conclusion, with the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. Anyone who was in the House when that legislation was—it is true—pushed forward in panic, will know that there is no parallel whatever with the process of decision making that led to that Act and the process that led to the Bill and the alternative propositions that we are discussing today. The Dangerous Dogs Act was introduced in haste, without a proper inquiry, and we have all lived to rue the day.

Mr. Budgen: And with a guillotine.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South–West says, "And with unity." The one thing that is guaranteed, not least by his presence, is that there will not be unity on the issue, and there is no suggestion that there should be.

We are completely unapologetic for our support for the guillotine. We believe that, eight months after the atrocity in Dunblane on 13 March, we owe it to the victims and their relatives and friends to bring to a conclusion the crucial issue of whether there should be a total or a partial ban on handguns. If we do that this evening, it will not be a second too soon.

4.36 pm

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South–West): The whole House knows that this guillotine is bad and even disgraceful. The proper use of the guillotine occurs when there have been excessive speeches or filibustering and when the sense of the House is that the legitimate opposition to a measure has gone too far and has ceased to have any support from outside; we then reluctantly proceed to curtail the debate.

This is the worst sort of guillotine, because it is an agreed guillotine; the House runs the risk of banding together as some form of lynch mob, taking away without proper consideration the rights of a significant and honourable minority.

When hon. Members say that we must act for the sake of the parents of Dunblane, I am reminded of our discussions about capital punishment; all of us who are opposed to capital punishment have had from time to time to deal with people whose relatives have been killed and who say, with great force, "Oh, but if only we'd had capital punishment, my daughter's murderer would have been deterred."

On such occasions, our duty as legislators is to say, "Well, I'm sure you believe that, but as a matter of fact we don't think that the evidence about deterrence is as strong as you suggest." In the same way, we as a House are surely entitled to say to the parents of Dunblane, "We understand your feelings; we share your grief; but we wonder whether the solution that you put forward is going to have the effect that you so much hope for."

It is important, as we talk about doing something for the parents of Dunblane, to remember one central fact: 96 per cent. of the crimes committed with firearms are committed with unlicensed weapons, upon which the Bill will have no effect whatever.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): The logic of my hon. Friend's argument worries me. We will not stop trying to get rid of illegal weapons while we are getting rid of legal ones. The two go hand in hand. Crack cocaine is available only illegally; does he suggest that we should make that lawful?

Mr. Budgen: That is entirely different. My point is that this legislation is directed towards the 4 per cent. of offences that are committed with legally held handguns. We are proposing expensive, cumbersome legislation, which is said to be demanded by the Dunblane parents—

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): How will a guillotine motion prevent anyone from making such points?

Mr. Budgen: Hon. Members always believe that the whole nation must have been listening to our excellent speeches, especially if it is their own speech, and that it has heard the arguments. That is not so. Most people outside the House are uninterested in the great issues.

Mr. Garrett: How does the guillotine affect that?

Mr. Budgen: I shall explain. It is by repetition, by argument and by demonstrating that there are people who hold a contrary view with as much force as those who hold the other view that we begin to understand that, in our grief or anger, we may be mistaken. The legislation tries to reduce the 4 per cent. of crimes that are committed by people with legally held handguns. It is reasonable to carry out our survey of the matter slowly, not least because of the money.

Money is important. Somewhere, no doubt, a gentleman aged 85 with a defective heart will be visiting his general practitioner's surgery to ask for a heart transplant. He may have with him five relatives who also demand it for him. The doctor will have to tell the old man, politely and diplomatically, that the cost of a heart transplant is not justified for a man of 85. It will be difficult, but it is one of the jobs that a GP has sometimes to discharge. It is not unreasonable for the House sometimes to have to tell people such as the Dunblane parents that, while we understand their anguish, we wonder whether their proposal would have the excellent effect that they want it to have.

[Mr. Budgen]

The money is important, because everyone knows that the House feels uncomfortable about the legislation. That view is not held only by Conservative Members but by many Opposition Members who have in their urban areas patriotic people who have been encouraged by successive Governments to have gun clubs. They have regarded them as being like the Territorial Army.

Those people are suddenly being regarded as bad citizens—dangerous people or awful nutters, who might do something such as Thomas Hamilton did. They resent that. What is our collective will going to be? Unless we go slowly and try to restore our sense of balance, and that of the country, we will say, "Okay, we have done these people a frightful injustice, but let's throw a lot of taxpayers' money at it."

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The hon. Gentleman mentions the taxpayers' money. What does he think the volume of compensation that will be asked for is likely to be? I have heard the figure of £1.2 billion being thrown around. That may seem staggering, but, given the antique value of many of the guns, it is perhaps not an exaggeration. The Home Secretary was reluctant to name a figure, which I can understand. What is the hon. Gentleman's figure?

Mr. Budgen: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that point. I asked in the House some time ago how much the compensation would be. I had a document from one of the shooting organisations that put the figure at between £500 million and £1 billion. The hon. Gentleman will remember that the original money resolution suggested that the cost would be between £25 million and £50 million. The money resolution has now been widened enormously.

One has only to listen to this debate for five minutes to discover hon. Members who find that it is not convenient to tell the parents of Dunblane that what they want will not achieve their legitimate objectives; that it is uncomfortable and unpleasant to have to tell them that we disagree; and who therefore say, "Let's throw a bit of public money at this." I am not averse to throwing public money about in small quantities, but this case will involve very large quantities.

Paragraph 2(b) of the amended money resolution refers to

"any other loss which may be incurred as a result of that Act".

That could easily be £500 million; it could easily be more. Before we consider whether that is a sensible way to reduce the 4 per cent. of crimes that are committed with licensed weapons, we should ask how £500 million might be used elsewhere.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Not under this guillotine motion.

Mr. Budgen: These are all points that can be raised during the course of these agreed proceedings, which will be rushed through with the agreement of the House and of the Front-Bench spokesmen, and, most of all, with the Opposition abandoning their traditional role of ensuring proper debate.

In the unlikely event of there being a Labour Government after next May, the Opposition will find themselves in an extraordinary position. Labour has said that there will be no extra money for the national health service and not much extra for education. It is anxious to be the party of fierce controls on public expenditure, so that there is no risk that it might be accused of intending to stick up taxation on smart people from Islington or people who earn a hundred grand a year at the Bar, and so that the middle class can be reassured.

However, the Opposition are conniving at something that may cost £500 million. The Government have agreed to give £500 million extra funding to the health service to stave off crisis; £500 million on £64 billion is quite a bit of money. We will end up with an enormous bill for this legislation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you might say that this is wide of the mark, but it is not. We need to discuss the Bill slowly, so that, when Ministers or the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) are asked why Wolverhampton hospital cannot have another maternity unit, they can say that it is because we have allocated the money to reduce, possibly, the 4 per cent. incidence of firearms crimes that are committed with licensed guns. That is why we need to debate the issue slowly.

On this occasion, the Opposition have joined the lynch mob. They have abandoned their traditional role of ensuring proper debate and proper discussion. That is a disgrace. There is no doubt that there is nothing more tyrannical than an agreed House of Commons.

When my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary next has a row with the courts or finds that the House of Lords is cutting up rough with him, and we wonder in a detached way why it is that we have, as a nation, allowed ourselves to be subject to the indignity of the supervisory control of the European convention on human rights—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is experienced beyond belief on the European convention on human rights, but I do not believe that it has much to do with the guillotine.

Mr. Budgen: No, with the greatest respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is extremely relevant to the consideration of this agreed guillotine. Why is it that the British nation is prepared to deny the sovereignty of our Parliament? It is because, from time to time, our Parliament acts as a lynch mob. That is what we are doing today. Why is it that the courts are eroding our sovereignty? Why is it that the doctrine of judicial review has been so extended? It is because lawyers and judges say that Government after Government have eroded the power of the House of Commons, and with it the rights and dignities of those who send us to this place.

We deny ourselves our most important duty if we do not give this legislation the careful scrutiny that it certainly demands.

4.51 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Unlike the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen), I believe that the House of Commons is carrying out its rightful duty, and I hope that it will come to a rightful conclusion at the end of our debate.

I have no disagreement with those hon. Members who are opposed to the legislation and who obviously do not want the guillotine motion to be carried. Their opposition is a perfectly legitimate parliamentary weapon, because if one is not in favour of the principles of certain legislation, one is not likely to be in favour of the guillotine.

Those hon. Members, mainly on the Conservative Benches, who do not want to see a ban on handguns, be it according to the Government's proposals or what we would propose, will oppose the motion. As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said, they will act as I have done on most occasions, when I opposed guillotine motions for the simple reason that I opposed the relevant Government legislation.

I do not believe that the House is acting in haste—if anything, my criticism is that we have acted too slowly. I did not want an inquiry to be held after the terrible massacre of 16 children and their teacher on 13 March. I believed that the Government had a duty to act immediately after the tragedy at Dunblane.

That inquiry took place, and now, eight months and five days after one of the greatest tragedies to occur in our country—the deliberate killing of 16 young children and their teacher—the House of Commons is at long last debating the relevant legislation. I therefore cannot accept for one moment that we are legislating in haste, or that our approach is too hurried. I believe that we have a duty and a responsibility as the House of Commons to deal with a problem that should have been dealt with by legislation after the massacre at Hungerford in 1987.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South–West made much of compensation, and almost seemed to make a joking matter of the amount of money that might be paid out. I ask the House, what about compensation for those parents who lost their children and the husband and family of the teacher who was killed at Dunblane? It is not a matter of money. I accept that compensation might be paid to the gun owners, but, at the end of the day, the question for the House is what action we can take to try to prevent another Dunblane.

Of course I must accept that should the Government's proposals be accepted, or should a total ban on handguns be agreed, as I would like, there is no guarantee that another Dunblane will not occur, any more than there was a guarantee that another Hungerford would not take place. But I believe that there is less chance of such a tragedy occurring again if the desired legislation is passed. That legislation should be passed as quickly as possible, especially after all the delay that has already occurred.

The Government believe that a ban on 80 per cent. of handguns is sufficient, but I do not agree. If one is going to legislate, why not go the full hog? Why not take action along the lines that most people in the country want? Let there be no doubt that most people want a total ban on handguns, as shown in survey after survey. That is why I believe that action is necessary, and why the guillotine is quite justified.

Certain people are campaigning in favour of handguns. I can understand the anxiety of those who have been involved in a perfectly legitimate sporting activity. Shooting does not happen to be a hobby of mine, and I imagine that it is not a hobby for most of my right hon. and hon. Friends, but I accept that, up to now, it has been a perfectly legitimate one and within the law.

I certainly have no sympathy, however, with the smears that have been made, even of the parents who lost their children. I have referred to those tactics during previous Home Office questions, and my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) quoted them today. How can those Conservative Members who support the views of the gun lobby possibly not find those tactics as offensive as I do? I believe that they do.

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston–super–Mare): The British Shooting Sports Council, which has briefed me and my hon. Friends, has absolutely nothing to do with the organisation that has recently sprung up, and for reasons that I do not understand. I am perfectly happy to dissociate the shooters who are represented by Conservative Members from that organisation.

I must tell the hon. Gentleman, however, that the law-abiding shooting fraternity, to which he has just referred, has been subject to a co-ordinated press campaign that has reviled the motives of those who enjoy shooting, as though there was something evil in the very possession of a gun. I hope that he will have some sympathy for the disquiet and injustice felt by law-abiding people who go about their law-abiding business.

Mr. Winnick: I appreciate what the hon. Gentleman says. I have never been involved in any smear campaign against those who have practised a legitimate sporting activity, but the massacre at Hungerford in 1987 changed my mind about guns. I confess that I had not thought a ban necessary before that. If I must indulge in some self-criticism, perhaps I should have been more active in asking questions then, although I am sure that it would not have resulted in anything along the lines that I would have liked. I did not continue the campaign that many of us started for all handguns to be banned. If we had done so, perhaps we could now speak with a clearer conscience.

I have to say that, while I appreciate what the hon. Gentleman said in disassociating himself and those of his hon. Friends who share his views from the sort of smear attack that I mentioned, those attacks were nevertheless deeply offensive—especially those directed against the very people who lost their loved ones on 13 March. The debate will be much better if such smears and innuendoes are avoided.

After the guillotine motion is out of the way, I hope that my hon. Friends' amendment will be carried; even if it is not, however, we shall at least have made some substantial progress. Banning 80 per cent. of handguns is undoubtedly a step in the right direction. It will be welcomed in the country, even though there is an overwhelming majority, which extends far beyond Scotland, for a total ban on handguns. That is why it is so necessary that the legislation is debated and the House of Commons reaches a conclusion as quickly as possible.

5.1 pm

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): I am—temporarily, I hope—ambivalent about the motion. I am certain that the time allocated to debate the money resolution, which finished at about 4.30 pm, was inadequate to provide opportunities to debate the compensation aspect of the Bill. I hope that I shall be able to stay in order by telling my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary that there is a possible conundrum relating to compensation

[Mr. Michael Alison]

that might be so difficult for the clever chaps at the Home Office to work out that we will need to use all the time allocated for consideration of the Bill to understand it. That is why I shall make brief reference to the compensation problem that I would have raised, had there been time during the debate on the money resolution.

The problem relates to a firm in my constituency run by Mr. Tim Hannam, which is an important manufacturer and retailer of small arms and weapons. Among other things, it acts as a storage facility for the local police forces in West and North Yorkshire. It is also a manufacturing firm that is engaged in export, retail, wholesale and imports and it has a turnover of about £1.2 million a year.

One of the firm's problems is that it suffers from a substantial debtors' liability: bad debts have begun to accumulate because debts to the firm are chiefly owed by the sorts of gun shops and ranges that specialise in handguns, and their cash flow has suddenly seized up as a result of the Dunblane disaster and the Bill. My constituent's business therefore faces a growing volume of bad debts.

My point for the Home Secretary—one that I might have to make over an extended period, although I hope that that will not be necessary—is that, in considering amendments to the money resolution or to clause 11, I hope that he will be sensitive to the fact that bad debts become a liability in need of compensation for companies with a big turnover, such as my constituent's. Does the compensation have to be paid to the businesses that owe money to my constituent, which debts my constituent then has to claim from them, or does the fact of the bad debt on my constituent's annual accounts itself justify his being—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman, but it seems to me that he is straying into areas where he should not stray. We are considering the timetable motion and he must relate his remarks more closely to that.

Mr. Alison: I feared precisely that rebuke, Madam Deputy Speaker, which is why I was trying to tell my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary that the conundrum of whether compensation for debts will be given directly to the firm that is owed the bad debt or to the business that owes the debt is the sort that could be debated interminably. That is why I am raising the matter in connection with the timetable motion. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will recognise that that feature will require considerable consideration when we debate clause 11, and that he will allow me to put my concern on the record at this point in the proceedings.

5.5 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): Like the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), my memory of guillotine debates goes back only to 1979. I am not sure whether I have even spoken in one—I have certainly never spoken in favour of a guillotine motion, nor have I voted in favour of one, as I shall do this evening.

There is always some dubiety about whether guillotines are desirable. Speaking as one who has opposed legislation in Committee, I know that there is always the danger that, under a guillotine, one will have to give up time on matters on which one would like to speak and that Opposition Members will end up having surrendered to the Government the only weapon available to them—the weapon of time—because people filibuster too long on the early parts of a Bill. In some respects, this guillotine is perhaps too generous in some respects, but we have a fair amount of time to consider clause 1, which is the significant part of the Bill.

In response to remarks about panicking and rushing, it must be admitted that there was perhaps a degree of panic after 13 March, but it cannot be said that there was a sense of rushing following Hungerford, which occurred some 10 years ago. It is clear that, had we done our job better in the 1980s and had we been bold and effective enough in our consideration of licensing procedures, we might not have had to debate this Bill today.

It is rich for the opposition to the guillotine to take refuge in their opposition to judicial review. If we look at the sad story of Deputy Chief Constable McMurdo, we find that one of his major concerns was that any appeal or attempt at some form of judicial review would have failed. I speak as a Member of Parliament whose constituency is covered by Central Scotland police and who knows Douglas McMurdo. I feel that he has been made a scapegoat, because he worked within a structure that was not adequate to the requirements of the time.

The Bill is not only about guns but about the licensing of those who hold guns.

Mr. David Mellor (Putney): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Neill: Let me take my speech a little further and then I shall give way.

The Bill is about the licensing procedures for the holding of guns. Current legislation is defective and requires our attention.

Mr. Mellor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to raise a matter that has puzzled me. Although it was undoubtedly right for Mr. McMurdo to do what he did, why did the matter stop there? Why has the justice of the peace, who, according to Lord Cullen, barely knew Thomas Hamilton, apparently escaped any blame and not felt the necessity to resign from any post?

Mr. O'Neill: I think that the justice of the peace considered that his position differed somewhat from Mr. McMurdo's. There are often occasions on which we, as Members of Parliament, are asked to sign pieces of paper—for example, for people who want passports or documents witnessed—and we do so on the basis that the individual concerned is a constituent with whom we have a nodding acquaintance. We do not always know such people as well as perhaps we should.

That was not the case with Mr. McMurdo, who knew about Hamilton and did not feel confident that the law would back him if he chose to refuse the licence. One can consider that issue, as we shall do in Committee. I hope that the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) will be able to take time from his broadcasting duties to participate in the Committee and discuss the subject at length.

We got it wrong after Hungerford and we now have a chance to make some reparation. I speak unashamedly about the Dunblane connection; a matter of days after the tragedy, the woman who launched the Snowdrop campaign, came to my office asking me how to organise a petition. I said that she should ensure that the words were correct, as Parliament would refuse the petition if they were not, and we got it sorted out. We thought that the petition might attract 5,000 or 10,000 signatures; in the event, it attracted three quarters of a million signatures. It was a simple expression of the country's feeling. People say that it was emotional and that it was done in the heat of the moment, but even in June and July, after the petition had been presented, copies were still being signed. There is still a feeling in the country that something has to be done.

The gun lobby says that, in the main, its members are law-abiding citizens—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I fear that the hon. Gentleman is falling into the same trap as the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison). He must relate his remarks to the allocation of time, not the issues, important though they are.

Mr. O'Neill: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I accepted an intervention and was diverted from my course. I accept that speed is of the essence.

Great emphasis has been placed on the international sporting dimension. Future competitors in the Commonwealth games in New Zealand in 1998 are beginning their rigorous and lengthy preparations. The House would not be fair to the sport if it did not make the position crystal clear on opportunities for training and preparation—the individuals involved have to make the correct arrangements. I have heard that the measure may stymie competitive handgun shooting—if so, it is a risk that we must take.

Speed is of the essence; we have delayed for too long. It is important that we sort out the arrangements, in relation not just to the type of guns, but—I stress the importance of time in this context—to licensing. As we speak, the police are having to process licences under what we now consider to be defective arrangements. It is essential that we ensure that the police are able to do their job, that sportsmen understand the limitations that the legislation will impose on their activities, that the level of compensation is understood and that people can make the appropriate security arrangements. Those matters must be dealt with urgently, which is why the Opposition are prepared to support the guillotine motion and why there has been a fair degree of consensus nationally that something must be done.

Although the measures do not go as far as the Opposition would have liked, we recognise that the Government are offering us the opportunity to correct something that we should have got right after Hungerford—it is now more than 10 years later and we cannot delay any longer. I therefore support the guillotine motion.

5.13 pm

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): I find myself in a dilemma over the motion, as I have consistently voted in favour of guillotine motions. I feel strongly that guillotine motions should be passed automatically as, in my experience, the guillotine process often results in endless wasted hours on both sides of the House in debating clause 1, followed by far too rapid consideration of the Bill's details. I once promoted a guillotine motion on a private Member's Bill, which was unusual.

The Firearms (Amendment) Bill has been introduced in haste. The Firearms Consultative Committee, which was established under the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 to give expert advice to the Home Office, was not consulted until after the Bill had been published—a negation of the intention behind establishing that committee. There has been no time for consultation with the various interests as represented by the British Shooting Sports Council, of which I have declared my interest as a vice-chairman and former chairman.

I am sad that it is necessary to produce such complex legislation. Even today, we shall learn of the intricacies of the firearms laws, which I fully confess I shall never fully understand. It is better to introduce such measures in consultation with experts, and I am sorry that we will not do so on this occasion. Under the timetable motion, we shall, however, give full consideration to clause 1 today and to other clauses tomorrow. The Bill's Standing Committee stage will be rapid, and I prefer to begin to discuss the matters that concern us.

We are having today's debate because the Government, doubtless with the connivance of the usual channels—I cannot believe that the motion would have appeared on the Order Paper without such connivance—tabled a new sort of guillotine motion. That motion had escaped the eagle gaze of my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling). I am sure that he would prefer to be here today, but he is abroad on NATO business on behalf of the nation and the House. He spotted that the new procedure was to be nodded through and felt that we should not adopt such rules without a proper debate. He therefore, correctly, shouted, "Object," which is why we are now discussing a full guillotine motion.

I am torn between my defence of the opposition to the Bill and my desire to see it properly debated—I would certainly not wish to oppose the motion. My message to those on the Front Benches is not to try that trick again. Other hon. Members should beware when those on both Front Benches connive, as it is usually to the nation's disadvantage.

5.16 pm

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I can understand why the legislation is now before the House. After the searing, desperate, mind-numbing events of Dunblane, anyone would feel that something should be done urgently and that a solution was vital. But the legislation is no solution: it will not stop a future Hamilton. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) said, the vast majority of crimes carried out with firearms involve firearms that the measure will not ban or illegally held firearms. A potential Thomas Hamilton will continue to acquire weapons—the difference is that, in future, he will acquire them illegally and without the knowledge of—or giving notice to—the authorities.

In my limited experience, there are two circumstances in which the House is asked to introduce a guillotine: either there has been a manifesto commitment on a

[Mr. Tony Marlow]

measure that is supremely controversial in the House and the Opposition seek to overturn the will of the people as expressed in an election; or the Government are embarrassed. I have never known a Government to be as embarrassed over a measure that they have introduced in the House as this Government are over the Bill.

There are 321 Conservative Members of Parliament. Last week, 215 Conservative Members of Parliament voted for the Bill's Second Reading, which means that 106 Conservative Members voted against Second Reading, abstained or were paired—that would have been a small minority. There was a three-line Whip on a measure that the Government said was urgent and had to be dealt with quickly. In my 17 years in the House, I have not known a rebellion of such strength in the Government party—and the vast majority of Conservatives going through the Lobby on this supremely un-Conservative measure went through holding their political noses.

This is rushed legislation, and if one rushes legislation one is in grave danger of introducing mistaken legislation. This is mistaken legislation. As far as the House is concerned, we are here because we are here because we are here. What should we do? Delay is the enemy of bad legislation, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the only way to delay this legislation is to vote against the guillotine.

I should like to say to my hon. Friends who are Conservatives that we have heard from the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) that, in all his time in Parliament, this uniquely is the only time that the Opposition have sought to support a guillotine motion. Surely that should give them some cause for thought. Those of my right hon. Friends and hon. Friends who support this Government, this wise Government—in most circumstances, quite rightly—should give them the opportunity to think again, to withdraw this legislation, to go out to consultation, to introduce proper legislation, properly digested, that may well achieve some of the ambitions and objectives that the Government seek to achieve through this measure.

We are all privileged to be members of this House, members of this legislature of the United Kingdom. We should be very jealous in our regard as to what this legislature does. We should not pass bad legislation, and the first thing we can do is to block this guillotine and block this measure.

We may or may not do that, but what we do in this House is reflected in the other place, and if we start the struggle on behalf of the Government, on behalf of the House, on behalf of Parliament, against bad legislation, I can assure the House that the other place will follow our example.

5.21 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I will not detain the House for more than a minute or two, because I am conscious that it wants to get on to the substance of the debate.

I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) a distrust of guillotines that have cross-party support. I believe them to be deeply damaging to parliamentary democracy, and I see a very big difference between an opposed guillotine and an unopposed guillotine. I am very nervous of the principle of what we are about to do.

I should far rather have dealt with the main business without a guillotine, waited to see whether there was a filibuster and dealt with it as and when it happened, because I do not believe that there would have been one, and it would have been a better sign to the country that we could dispose of the business without having to use these procedures.

I also agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West that there is more than one way of responding positively to the bereaved parents. As I said on Second Reading, I believe that backing Lord Cullen and his proposals is the right way to proceed. But—and it is a big but—drawing on my experience as a bereaved parent, I believe that taking a speedy final decision one way or the other will be part of the healing process, even if that decision is not the one that the parents want.

I hope very much, therefore, that I shall not damage the reputation of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) when I say that I agree with what he said. He was right when he said, "Let's take a decision tonight." I wish only that it was without a guillotine, especially one that has the Labour party's support.

5.23 pm

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): I shall be extremely brief.

I am of the school of people who believe that guillotines are usually satisfactory for Bills and debates because they ensure greater focus, and on this occasion I believe that the time that is being made available for us is reasonably generous, but I wish to speak because I hope that, under the provisions of the timetable, we shall have the opportunity to debate one or two very important side issues that crucially affect the livelihoods of many people.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison), I wanted to raise my point on the money resolution, but there was not time for many hon. Members to speak on that. I hope that there will be time to discuss the largest civilian shooting range in the United Kingdom—Wedgnock range at Warwick. Hon. Members probably suppose that the largest shooting range is Bisley, but that is a forces range.

I hope that time will be available during our proceedings, although perhaps not today or tomorrow, to take into account the fact that there is a real danger that that range will have to close because it is extremely reliant on small arms usage by clubs, individuals and organisations. It is part of this country's shooting heritage. It is used by the police and other people. I am advised that there is a very real danger that, once the Bill becomes law, it will go out of existence. I hope that I can leave that point with Ministers.

5.25 pm

Mr. Straw: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to make some closing remarks.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) said that there was nothing more tyrannical than an agreed House of Commons, as though that were something that happened almost every day. Whatever other accusation may be made against the Secretary of State, the one that he is a pushover when it comes to agreeing with the Opposition is not one that lies against him—or, I suggest to him, the reverse.

I do not believe that there is anything tyrannical about a House of Commons agreeing on an issue on which it is agreed. The public expect us to agree about a measure such as this. I am glad that there is a substantial measure of agreement between the parties on the need to bring the Bill before the House today and resolve some of its principal parts, and on the need for there to be much increased control of guns, even if there is disagreement about the extent of that control.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West made what I considered to be a very intemperate and misplaced remark, comparing the House of Commons to a lynch mob. There may be occasions when that type of metaphor could appropriately be used, but I do not believe that such language is acceptable in a serious debate on gun control in the wake of the terrible circumstances of 13 March.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Some Conservative Members spoke about delaying tactics. We should emphasise the fact that this is a matter of considerable urgency. I remind my hon. Friend that when the Dublin Parliament, the Dail, enacted the Firearms Act 1971 in response to the increasing troubles in the Six Counties, it did so with similar urgency. That Firearms Act is not altogether unlike the Bill before us.

Mr. Straw: I know that to be true. In the south of Ireland there remains a substantial problem of illegal firearms, but the Dail enacted legislation on legal firearms very swiftly, and no compensation was paid. There was a total ban on all handguns.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West asserted that the European convention on human rights challenged our sovereignty. We, as a Parliament, voluntarily agreed to sign the European convention on human rights in, I believe, 1951. The Conservative Government have extended the rights of individuals to petition before the European Court, and at any stage Parliament can decide to withdraw from that convention.

The hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) would have preferred to discuss this business without a guillotine—a widely shared view—but it became clear to both sides of the House that that was unlikely to be possible. We would have had a very disorderly debate on a key issue without a guillotine.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I am always delighted to give way to the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman).

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I am two paragraphs behind the hon. Gentleman. I wonder whether he agrees that the European convention on human rights, which was merely signed and never went through the House, would have gone through in quite the way that it did if it had been thoroughly debated. It would have been a little less woolly.

Mr. Straw: I am afraid that I was not in the House in 1951, although the hon. Lady may have been—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady and I have a special relationship. I bow to her superior knowledge on all occasions. I believe that the convention was debated—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: No.

Mr. Straw: If the hon. Lady says that it was not, I accept that. However, it would have been open to her or any other hon. Member, at any stage during the past 17 years, to raise the issue of the convention if it was as dreadful an instrument as has been suggested. It would have been open to the Government to propose withdrawal from it: neither circumstance has arisen.

The hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) said that he had never seen a rebellion of such magnitude as apparently occurred on Second Reading of this Bill. On his count, on a three-line Whip 214 Conservative Members voted in favour of Second Reading. His memory must be very short. He may like to know that on Second Reading of the Crime (Sentences) Bill only a week previously, the Home Secretary could muster less than half of the parliamentary Conservative party—just 149 Members—to support his Bill.

Mr. Marlow *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I know that the hon. Gentleman is concerned about that, but he should take it up with the Home Secretary.

It is not unheard of—although it is unusual—for the Opposition to support a guillotine motion. We believe that it is appropriate in this case because it is important that the House should now proceed to debate the key issue of whether there should be a total or a partial ban on handguns.

5.31 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): In accordance with the spirit of the motion, I will make an extremely short speech.

Many important issues were raised that will fall to be addressed when we consider the issues substantively during further stages of the Bill. I want to respond to only two points. First, my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) suggested that the Firearms Consultative Committee did not have an opportunity to consider our proposals before the Bill was published. In fact, it considered its response to our proposed response on 23 October, before the Bill was published. It gave us advice on that basis. Since then, the committee has considered the Bill on two occasions and we have accepted a number of its suggestions.

Secondly, I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) that it is not true that guillotines are applied only when there has already been substantial or excessive debate. There is nothing unique about proposing a timetable motion before discussion of various stages of a Bill.

We have allocated a generous amount of time. I reject the Opposition's contention that we have acted too slowly.

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): Having failed to catch the Chair's eye, I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for giving way.

[Mr. Peter Brooke]

Will she give me an assurance that during the Standing Committee—which will have only a limited amount of time—adequate time will be made available to consider the interests of those who shoot competitively at county and national level and are anxious about the wording of the Bill beyond clause 5?

Miss Widdecombe: Within the time constraints available to us, we will consider all matters that are raised and selected by the Chairman of the Committee for debate. I very much hope that, during the various stages of the Bill, there will be an opportunity to consider the interests of all those who are affected by the Bill, in whatever way.

Before the very helpful intervention by my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), I rejected the Opposition's contention that we have moved too slowly. This is an important issue that required coherent, sensible and balanced responses from us. I believe that we have now brought those together in this Bill. I recommend the timetable motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Bill:—

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE HOUSE

1.—(1) The proceedings in Committee of the whole House shall be completed in two allotted days and shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the second of those days.

(2) On the first allotted day—

(a) proceedings on any amendments to Clause No. 1 which may be selected and which would amend that Clause at any place before the words "a small-calibre pistol" at line 16 of page 1 of the Bill shall be brought to a conclusion one hour after the commencement of proceedings on the first such amendment;

(b) proceedings on any amendments to Clause No. 1 which may be selected and which would leave out the words "a small-calibre pistol" at line 16 of page 1 of the Bill shall be brought to a conclusion three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the first such amendment;

(c) proceedings on any other amendments to Clause No. 1 which may be selected shall be brought to a conclusion one hour after the commencement of proceedings on the first such amendment; and

(d) the remaining proceedings on Clause No. 1 shall be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

(3) No motion as to the order in which proceedings are to be considered in the Committee shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown and the Question on any such motion shall be put forthwith.

(4) When the Order of the Day is read for the House to resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill, the Speaker shall leave the Chair without putting any Question and the House shall resolve itself into a Committee forthwith whether or not notice of an Instruction to the Committee has been given; and Standing Order No. 64 (Committee of whole House on bill) shall not apply.

(5) Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings to which this paragraph applies on the first allotted day.

(6) Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) shall not apply in relation to the proceedings to which this paragraph applies.

STANDING COMMITTEE

2.—(1) The Standing Committee to which the remainder of the Bill is allocated shall report the Bill not later than 28th November.

(2) Proceedings at a sitting of the Standing Committee on 28th November may continue until Ten o'clock whether or not the House is adjourned before that time, and if the House is adjourned before those proceedings have been brought to a conclusion, the Standing Committee shall report the Bill to the House on 29th November.

REPORT

3.—(1) The proceedings on consideration shall be completed in one allotted day and shall be brought to a conclusion at midnight.

(2) Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to those proceedings.

THIRD READING

4.—(1) The proceedings on Third Reading shall be completed in one allotted day and shall be brought to a conclusion three hours after their commencement.

(2) Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to those proceedings.

BUSINESS COMMITTEE

5.—(1) For the purposes of Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) this Order shall be taken to allot to the proceedings on consideration of the Bill such part of the allotted day as the Resolution of the Business Committee may determine.

(2) The Business Committee shall report to the House its Resolution as to the proceedings on consideration, not later than the fourth day on which the House sits after the day on which the Chairman of the Standing Committee reports the Bill to the House.

(3) Any Resolution of the Business Committee may be varied by a further Report of the Committee under Standing Order No. 80, whether or not within the time specified in sub-paragraph (2) and whether or not that Resolution has been agreed to by the House.

(4) No Motion shall be made as to the order in which proceedings on consideration are taken, but the Resolutions of the Business Committee may include alterations in that order.

PROCEDURE IN STANDING COMMITTEE

6.—(1) At a sitting of the Standing Committee at which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion under a Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee, the Chairman shall not adjourn the Committee under any Order relating to the sittings of the Committee until those proceedings have been brought to a conclusion.

(2) No Motion shall be made in the Standing Committee relating to the sitting of the Committee except by a Minister of the Crown, and the Chairman shall permit a brief explanatory statement from the Member who moves, and from a Member who opposes, the Motion, and shall then put the Question thereon.

(3) No Motion shall be made as to the order in which proceedings are to be considered in the Standing Committee, but the Resolutions of the Business Sub-Committee may include alterations in that order.

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS IN COMMITTEE

7. On the conclusion of the proceedings in any Committee on the Bill, the Chairman shall report such of the Bill's provisions as were committed (or re-committed) to that Committee to the House without putting any Question.

DILATORY MOTIONS

8. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of proceedings on, the Bill shall be made in the Standing Committee or on an allotted day except by a Minister of the Crown, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

EXTRA TIME

9. If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment

of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) stands over from an earlier day, paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

10. Any private business which has been set down for consideration at Seven o'clock on an allotted day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business for a period of three hours from the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill or, if those proceedings are concluded before Ten o'clock, for a period equal to the time elapsing between Seven o'clock and the conclusion of those proceedings.

PROCEDURE AT TIME FOR CONCLUSION OF PROCEEDINGS

11. For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee or the Business Sub-Committee and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, the Chairman or the Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time, whether before the time so appointed or in pursuance of paragraph (a), the Question that the Clause or Schedule, or the Clause or Schedule as amended, be added to the Bill);

(c) the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper, whether in the name of a Minister of the Crown or not, which is moved or made by a Minister of the Crown;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a motion so made for a new Clause or new Schedule, the Chairman or the Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

12.—(1) Proceedings under paragraph 11 of this Order shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(2) If an allotted day is one on which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) would, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock—

(a) that Motion shall stand over until the conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion at or before that time;

(b) the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

(3) If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

SUPPLEMENTAL ORDERS

13.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made in the House by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order (including anything which might have been the subject of a report of the Business Committee or Business Sub-Committee) shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced.

(2) Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to those proceedings.

(3) If on an allotted day on which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before that time no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

SAVING

14. Nothing in this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee or Business Sub-Committee shall—

(a) prevent any proceedings to which the Order or Resolution applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by the Order or Resolution; or

(b) prevent any business (whether on the Bill or not) from being proceeded with on any day after the completion of all such proceedings on the Bill as are to be taken on that day.

RECOMMITTAL

15.—(1) References in this Order to proceedings on consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings at those stages respectively, for, on or in consequence of, recommittal.

(2) On an allotted day no debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and the Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

INTERPRETATION

16. In this Order—

"allotted day" means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the Day, provided that a Motion for allotting time to the proceedings on the Bill to be taken on that day either has been agreed on a previous day, or is set down for consideration on that day;

"Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee" means a Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee as agreed to by the Standing Committee;

"the Bill" means the Firearms (Amendment) Bill;

"Resolution of the Business Committee" means a Resolution of the Business Committee as agreed to by the House.

Orders of the Day

Firearms (Amendment) Bill

[Clauses Nos. 1 to 5 and any new Clauses and Schedules appearing on the Order Paper not later than Friday 15th November which relate to the prohibition of small firearms or to further special exemptions from the general prohibition of small firearms.]

Considered in Committee.

[DAME JANET FOOKES *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

EXTENSION S.5 OF THE FIREARMS ACT 1968 TO PROHIBIT CERTAIN SMALL FIREARMS

5.35 pm

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston–super–Mare): I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 1, line 15, after 'weapon' insert

'(including those powered by carbon dioxide)'.

This is a minor amendment which has long been recommended by the Firearms Consultative Committee. That committee was told some time ago that it could not have this modest concession until there was major legislation. I am very hopeful that my pleas will fall on receptive ears. It is ridiculous that a weapon powered by air pressure can be used without a certificate while an identical weapon powered by carbon dioxide will be confined to section 5. It is so clearly an historical breach of detail that I hope that the Government will accept the amendment.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): There is, indeed, a case for exempting low-powered carbon dioxide handguns from the general prohibition because they are no more dangerous than the low-powered airguns that are currently exempted. Not unnaturally, as the clause is concerned with handguns only, the amendment deals with carbon dioxide handguns and not long-barrelled guns. We intend to table an amendment to ensure that all forms of low-powered carbon dioxide weapons are treated in the same way as low-powered airguns. On the basis of that undertaking, I ask my hon. Friend to withdraw his amendment.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I beg to move amendment No. 6, in page 1, line 16, after 'apply', insert

', a firearm which is incapable of holding more than one cartridge'.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes): With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 7, in page 2, line 6, after second 'pistol', insert

'which is capable of holding more than one cartridge and'.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: Amendment No. 6 would exclude single-shot pistols from section 5. It covers both .22 and higher calibres. There are a number of different types, but the guns are few in number. Some would be banned because they fall outside other provisions of the Bill, such as the limitation on length. Among the higher-calibre, single-shot weapons there are perhaps a few hundred in use. These guns do not feature in the Olympic games, but are an important part of the Commonwealth games and all international matches. It is a sport at which Britain excels. We have won 19 medals at the last three Commonwealth games, including seven golds.

At no time did Lord Cullen suggest that a ban on single-shot guns was appropriate. He made a very clear distinction between multi-shot and single-shot guns and made no recommendation for the further control of single-shot guns. Of course, a single-shot gun is an infinitely less lethal weapon than an ordinary shotgun, for example.

Amendment No. 7 alters the definition of small-calibre pistols so that it will exclude only single-shot .22 calibre pistols from the Bill's provisions. I fully accept that if this amendment were to be acceptable, a new paving amendment in subsection 2 would be required at the Report stage.

Fewer than 5 per cent. of .22s are single shot pistols. They are used for Olympic discipline free-pistol shooting, which is the most prestigious—the crème de la crème—Olympic shooting event. The .22 single-shot pistol is used at both the top and the bottom ends of shooting. They are used by elite Olympic shooters, who use carefully honed and expensive guns, and by beginners, who often start out with a single-shot .22.

The question is clear: is a single-shot weapon really so lethal that it should be banned, or are not we going too far in our endeavour to make apparent concessions to public safety? I say "apparent concessions" because the matter was debated at considerable length last week.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Howard): My hon. Friend the Member for Weston–super–Mare has summarised the effect of the amendments. They would exempt single-shot pistols from the general prohibition, effectively limiting the ban to multi-shot guns. They would particularly allow single-shot handguns to continue to be kept at home.

I cannot invite hon. Members to support the amendments. The Government believe that there is no place for handguns in the home. As is self-evident, even a single-shot handgun can be used to kill, and they are very easy to carry and to conceal.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): In framing his reply to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Weston–super–Mare, will my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State go beyond the question of whether such guns should be kept at home to answer the burden of the point made by my hon. Friend—that we would like to keep the Commonwealth games in this country and our competitors to be able to take part in them? Will my right hon. and learned Friend suggest other amendments to the Bill that would enable that to happen in a safe manner?

Mr. Howard: I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Weston–super–Mare was concentrating more on the Olympic than the Commonwealth games. We do not ban

any of the weapons that are used in Olympic competition. In the Bill, we ban some of the weapons that are used in the Commonwealth games, but they are used in only one of the competitions in those games. All Olympic competitions use .22 calibre weapons, and all but one Commonwealth competition use .22 calibre weapons.

I made the Government's position clear on this matter last week. It is possible for the holder of my office to authorise that element of the Commonwealth games that is not a .22 calibre competition to take place at Manchester. It is true, however, that the Bill's effect would be that no British competitor would be able to practice in this country for that element—it is one element only—of the Commonwealth games. As I explained last week, it is true that that is a consequence of the Bill's provisions.

The purpose of amendment Nos 6 and 7 is to allow people to keep handguns in the home. We do not believe that the public can be given the protection they need and deserve if handguns continue to be kept at home. That is why I invite the Committee to reject them.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): In the spirit of this debate, I am pleased to agree with the comments made by the Secretary of State. I also agree that high-calibre single-shot pistols are extremely lethal—as has been demonstrated by evidence presented to many hon. Members over the past few weeks and months. I am sure that such evidence will continue to be produced during the remainder of this week. If one accepts that we must take action to outlaw pistol shooting in shooting clubs, it would be unacceptable to allow the type of exception provided for in amendment No. 6. The type of weapon we are talking about is particularly lethal. It may not be as lethal as the multi-shot pistol, but it has the ability to kill very quickly.

5.45 pm

There is another reason why I hope that the Committee will not accept amendment No. 6. I believe that he and his colleagues are trying to pick apart the Bill. If one examines amendment Nos 6 and 7, and subsequent amendments, one will notice an attempt to exclude various categories of weapons from the provisions of the Bill. The effect would be that the Bill would prohibit only Magnum pistols and perhaps some pistols smaller than .32, which are used for vermin control, and that all others would be acceptable. That would run a coach and horses through the Bill and would not accord with the will of the vast majority of hon. Members.

Although people have a right to enjoy their sport, we should weigh that privilege against the risk that guns will be used as they were in Dunblane. I take part in many sports and on most occasions I support the sporting world and some of its arguments, but I do not believe that one can argue that the rights and privileges of the sportsperson should take precedence over the very real risk to the population. That is why I do not believe that the House should accept amendment No. 6 or some of the other amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wigging).

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I do not intend to speak for long, and I do not intend to intervene regularly. I should, however, like to mention one matter. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) mentioned the wish of the overwhelming majority of hon. Members. It is quite true that all hon. Members are deeply saddened and appalled by what happened in Dunblane—there is not a cigarette paper of difference between any of us on that—but there is considerable unease, not only on the Conservative Benches but on both sides of the House, about the tone and content of this legislation. I should not like the debate to end without my right hon. and learned Friend being aware that I share that unease.

Rarely is panic legislation good legislation. Although Thomas Hamilton acted in an unspeakable manner with the weapons that he legally possessed, he is—as one of my correspondents said to me this morning—having his revenge in this legislation, which will penalise many law-abiding citizens who have never comtemplated and would never contemplate doing wrong.

Thomas Hamilton could have inflicted equal damage if he had run amok with a motor car. He could have inflicted damage with a variety of weapons and implements, as could any other evil man or madman—and I believe that Thomas Hamilton was the former. It is incumbent on all hon. Members, however great our sympathy for those who have suffered—I hope that no one's sympathy is greater than mine—to realise that we have a duty to try to distance ourselves and to be objective in what we are trying to do and in the legislation that we frame. I do not believe that this legislation will enhance Parliament's reputation, or that it is really serving our country's interests.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I should like to share with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary a point made by one of my constituents who shoots regularly, who is an elderly and extremely responsible citizen. He said that the shooting club to which he belongs, which uses .22 weapons, uses the Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve range in Gillingham to enjoy the sport. One of the problems that they foresee is that the TAVR range in Gillingham may not want to have secure storage for their weapons on the premises on which they shoot. That could be a problem across the country. I certainly agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary in his opposition to making exceptions to the secure storage provisions. If many of the shooters who would be allowed to continue their sport with their weapons find themselves precluded because the TAVR, for example, will not allow storage to be constructed, there will be a justifiable outcry. Such people will be deprived of their sport by default rather than by the Bill.

Amendment negatived.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I beg to move amendment No. 17,in page 1, line 16, after 'apply', insert 'a permitted centre-fire pistol'.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following: Amendment No. 19, in page 2, line 7, at end add—

'(1B) In this Act "permitted centre-fire pistol" means a pistol chambered for .32 or smaller centre-fire cartridges and suitable for participation in competitions shot in accordance with the rules of the Union Internationale de Tir.'.

[The Second Deputy Chairman]

Amendment No. 18, in page 2, line 7, at end add—

(1B) In this Act "permitted centre–fire pistol" means a pistol chambered for .32 or smaller centre–fire cartridges'.

Amendment No. 30, in page 2, line 7, at end add—

'(1B) In this Act "permitted centre–fire pistol" means a pistol chambered for .32 or .38 special or smaller centre–fire cartridges.'.

New clause 7—*Centre–fire competition pistols*—

The authority of the Secretary of State is not required by virtue of subsection (1) (aba) of section 5 of the 1968 Act for a person to have in his possession, or to purchase or acquire, or to sell or transfer a firearm if he is authorised by a firearm certificate to have in his possession, or to purchase or acquire a pistol chambered for .32 or smaller centre–fire cartridges for use in competitions shot in accordance with the rules of the Union Internationale de Tir.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: In response to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), I see the matter from his point of view in so far as later amendments are germane to this debate, and it would have been easier to talk about exceptions once the next question had been resolved. As long as the Labour party remains opposed to all handguns, I expect no sympathy from Opposition Members.

If we are to be allowed to keep any handguns—the reasons can be well argued, and will become apparent in the next debate—it is not unreasonable that we should seek to spread as widely as possible the range of handguns used for international competition purposes, which are very unlikely to be selected even by a maniac, because, being single-shot, they are quite unsuitable for death and destruction. They are suitable for shooting at targets, which is what they are designed to do and what they are used for. The single-shot .22, which we have just been debating, is the type of gun that an individual could manufacture. It is often a labour of love to put together such specialist and highly accurate single-shot guns.

I am sorry that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has seen fit to draw the line where he has. This group of amendments, Miss Fookes, seeks to extend the lower limit to .32 and smaller calibre pistols. Such guns do not use a conventional cartridge of the type that one would expect. They use what are known as wadcutter cartridges, and are generally known as the .32 wadcutters. The name derives from the fact that the cartridge is designed especially to be fired at cardboard. The blunt-nosed bullet does not expand on impact, and cuts a cleaner hole in a cardboard target—like a flying paper punch—making the measurement more accurate.

These pistols are used in the majority of Commonwealth games shooting events, as well as other international competitions. In the previous three Commonwealth games, British competitors won three medals, including one gold, in the .32 centre-fire event. A Briton also won a silver medal in the 1995 Commonwealth shooting championships. I should like to argue with my right hon. and learned Friend about the calibre, muzzle speed and impact of such guns, but, in some respects, that may be an argument against his position on a subsequent amendment.

The fact is that we are talking about low-power, target-shooting handguns that are not designed for killing. They are designed to fire 25 metres, and for competition.

Mr. Henderson: I had a meeting with representatives of the Metropolitan Police, who told me that any gun could kill anyone. Did the hon. Gentleman taken such background advice into account when framing his comments?

Sir Jerry Wiggin: Of course any gun can kill anyone, and so can any knife. If one pursued that argument, it would be logical to say that there should be no guns at all, but I do not think that the Opposition Front Benchers, even in their wildest moments, have said that.

The amendment is an attempt to define a line which we believe can be reasonably argued, which can be backed by Cullen's report, and which is in Britain's best national interests in shooting competitions. I commend it to the Committee.

I owe you a personal apology, Dame Janet, because I fear that I have been addressing you incorrectly. It was mere forgetfulness, and I hope that you will accept my apology at face value.

The Second Deputy Chairman: That is quite all right, Mr. Wiggin!

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I was hoping to make an intervention, but the hon. Member for Weston–super–Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) got a little hard of hearing and then sat down. I shall therefore make my point by way of a short speech.

The hon. Member may be surprised to know that I had some sympathy with his previous attempt to exempt single-shot weapons. Secure storage of single-shot handguns may be practicable, but the matter was not pressed to a vote.

The amendment that we are debating deals with exempting pistols that are meant purely for sport. There is a great difference between a pistol that is intended to be used for sporting purposes but which is still capable of rapid fire and which can cause a great deal of damage to or kill or maim many people one after the other, and a sporting pistol used purely for that purpose, which is capable only of a single shot. Certainly it can still kill, but the risk is less. If it were securely stored, it would raise different issues.

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will later clarify whether this group of amendments would exempt only single-shot pistols, which is the type that he referred to, or whether it would also exempt multi-shot pistols for sporting purposes.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick–upon–Tweed): Will the Home Secretary clarify what he said about the Commonwealth games and competitive shooting? He made it clear that, under the Bill as drafted—without this or other amendments—no British competitor could practise for the Commonwealth games. However, unless I misheard him, he seemed to imply that the games could be held with this category of event included. I do not understand how he can base that argument on the Bill as drafted.

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): I am seriously worried about the effect that the Bill might have on our sporting chances at the Olympic and Commonwealth games. People who participate in shooting events take their sport seriously and are reasonable people. Anything we do that damages our chances in this sport should be examined.

I am honoured to be taking over the southern region of the Sports Aid Foundation, which raises money to help young people to participate in sport. I am worried that, if the amendment is rejected, we shall be damaging our nation's sporting interests. I should be grateful if my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary would bear that in mind.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North–West): I support the amendment, for all the reasons outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Weston–super–Mare (Sir J. Wiggin). I voted for the amendment that would have prevented Second Reading. I believe that, despite our feelings about what happened in Dunblane, the House is not capable of legislating against evil.

I want to exemplify my concern at the stance adopted by the Opposition to this group of amendments by drawing attention to on of the many letters that I have received from my constituents—and, indeed, from other people.

6 pm

With your permission, Dame Janet, I should like to quote a passage or two from a letter from my constituent, Gary Tomkins, exemplifying the fundamental conceptual flaw in the Bill. He says:

"In 1989 at the age of 22 I had a very severe industrial accident which left me with a damaged spine and a totally paralysed right arm and hand. Before my accident I had been a very active and fit person but could not continue my hobbies. I was a martial arts instructor and had taken part in competitions all over the country. My accident was in February 1989 and I was due to take part in the European championships in Belgium in the May of '89. I had trained hard and was expected to be very highly placed. I also could not continue my football or climbing. A close friend asked if I would like to go to Llandudno Pistol Club with him and I started to go as a probationary member. I became a full member in 1994. It is not an overstatement to say it changed my life. I go three times a week and it is a hobby I have pursued to a very high standard. I have recently been asked to shoot for my country. It is now my one and only hobby that my disability does not affect as it is not a contact sport. Myself and three other members of the pistol club travel all over Britain shooting at different competitions. I hold nine target pistols, five centrefire and four rimfire for shooting all the different disciplines I shoot."

My constituent then writes of his upset at the dreadful events in Dunblane. He says:

"After Dunblane I found it hard to shoot but thought 'why not, I have done nothing wrong.' Competition shooting is one of the safest sports and enjoyed by people from all walks of life and all sections of society."

He concludes:

"The target shooters I have spoken to on the subject feel that we are being 'tarred with the same brush' as Thomas Hamilton. We do not understand why the sport of Target Shooting is to be practically wiped out because of the actions of one evil individual. It is not possible in any way to legislate against an unsound mind . . . I am just asking for the right to continue with the sport that I care so much about and which helped me to come to terms with the loss of my other activities."

That letter puts it better than I could. The amendments are sound, and I shall support them.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I can well understand the viewpoint of the hon. Member for Clwyd, North–West (Mr. Richards). Not long ago, one of my constituents was shot and murdered with a gun. As far as I am concerned, guns are made to kill people, and it is time we took them out of the system and out of society to ensure that folk can live in peace and harmony at home, without fear of someone possessing a gun.

I am unequivocally opposed to handguns being kept at home. Many innocent people such as me fear them. It is time that we put ourselves right and stopped these guns being used. I can understand the quest for sport. We all enjoy sport. However, after what we have seen in Dunblane and Hungerford, it is time for the House to act to ensure that no one—and I mean no one—in this country, except representatives of the law and our armed forces, has the right to own pistols. God forgive us if we allow this to continue.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): I had not intended to speak, but I cannot let what the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) has just said go unchallenged. He should realise that a skean-dhu in the hands of a madman is a lethal weapon.

Weapons are lethal only if people intend to use them in an evil way. Our debates should concentrate on the problem. The problem at Dunblane was an evil individual. No amount of legislation will remove evil people from society.

Mr. Henderson: I do not want to labour my comments on these amendments, because I have little to add to what I said on the previous amendments. The hon. Member for Weston–super–Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) is again seeking to insert a long list of exemptions to make the provisions of the Bill inadequate.

The hon. Member for Clwyd, North–West (Mr. Richards) got to the point of the sports issue. He said that competition shooting was one of the safest sports. Hamilton was a member of two shooting clubs—one in Callender and one in Clyde valley. I am pretty sure that those clubs take part in competitive shooting. We cannot say that competition shooting was safe for the 17 people who died at Dunblane or for their environment. That is the central issue.

As I said on the previous amendments, it is a privilege to take part in sports. Other shooting sports opportunities are available to those who want to take part, including rifle shooting, shotgun shooting for game, and clay pigeon shooting with shotguns. Shooting sports based on pistols have been shown to be dangerous. That is why I hope that the House does not accept the amendments.

Mr. Howard: I begin by associating myself with the apologies of my hon. Friend the Member for Weston–super–Mare (Sir J. Wiggin). I earlier fell into the same error as that into which he had fallen, and I apologise.

The amendments would exempt centre-fire handguns from the general prohibition, particularly those of .32 calibre or smaller, with amendment 30 also exempting those of .38 calibre. We have given a great deal of consideration to the distinction between the lower .22 rim-fire calibre and higher calibres, and I cannot invite the Committee to accept the amendments.

It is true that there are serious competitive target shooting events at higher calibres. However, .32 and .38 handguns take conventional centre-fire ammunition. Although, for competition shooting, they may use low-powered ammunition for the purposes of accuracy,

[Mr. Howard]

they are equally capable of using much more powerful ammunition. There is no distinction between the power of those guns and that of other high-calibre handguns. Handguns such as pocket pistols chambered for .32 rounds are often used in crime.

In contrast, the power of a .22 calibre rim-fire handgun is limited by the nature of the ammunition that it uses. As the table in paragraph 9.49 of Lord Cullen's report shows, a .22 calibre round is four to six times less powerful than a high-calibre round.

The right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed (Mr. Beith) asked about the Commonwealth games. I should make it clear that the amendments would have no impact on the Olympic games, in which pistols of .22 calibre only are used. The amendments would permit exemptions for higher-calibre guns.

The right hon. Gentleman asked how it would be possible for the Commonwealth games to take place with a full complement of events. I understand that one of the five pistol shooting events in the Commonwealth games is for pistols of a higher calibre than .22. The other four events are for .22 calibre guns. I have authority under section 5 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1968 to enable that event to take place in Manchester in 2002 if the organisers of the Commonwealth games wish it. Nothing in the Bill would take away that authority.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Will British sportsmen be able to participate in the Commonwealth games using that class of gun?

Mr. Howard: As I have indicated in the past, British competitors will not be able to practise in this country for that event. I believe that the authority I am able to give under section 5 of the 1968 Act would enable people to take part in the competition.

We all listened with great interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North–West (Mr. Richards), who read out a moving letter from one of his constituents, for whom target shooting was an important part of life. Many of us can sympathise with that constituent's views. Indeed, it is because we believe that it is possible to give the public the protection they need and deserve while allowing those in the position of my hon. Friend's constituent to continue some limited shooting, that the Government have taken their position, and will invite the Committee later this evening to reject amendment No.1.

I entirely accept that, as a result of the Bill, my hon. Friend's constituent will not be able to carry on with all the kinds of shooting in which he presently engages. That is true, but he will be able to continue to shoot .22 pistols. I very much hope that, in that way, he will continue to derive the satisfaction that he currently gets from shooting, which was fully explained in the letter my hon. Friend read out. I believe that the Bill will enable my hon. Friend's constituent and many others like him to continue with their legitimate activity, while giving the public the protection they need and deserve by dealing with higher-calibre guns.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I have a correspondent who is not dissimilar from the one quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North–West (Mr. Richards). Why would the public be at greater risk if the two people we are talking about and others like them were allowed to keep their weapons in secure and registered gun club premises? I have always felt that handguns should not be kept at home, but should be kept in clubs. Why would the public be at greater risk if those people, many of them handicapped and unable to use other weapons such as shotguns and rifles, kept their weapons in secure and licensed gun club premises?

Mr. Howard: We will deal with that precise point in due course, because some of the later amendments deal with the generality of higher-calibre weapons. The answer to my hon. Friend's point is that higher-calibre weapons are much more powerful.

I said that, if one looks at the very helpful table at paragraph 9.49 of Lord Cullen's report, one sees clearly that a .22 calibre round is four to six times less powerful than a high-calibre round. Higher-calibre guns are more attractive to criminals and are more often used by criminals. They would make the clubs a much more attractive target for criminals.

I accept that, at the end of the day, there is a difficult matter of judgment. However, there are a number of reasons why we have come to the conclusion that the appropriate place at which to draw the line is the .22 calibre. That enables .22 calibre shooting but not higher calibre shooting to continue.

Dr. John Gilbert (Dudley, East): I have a lot of sympathy with the Home Secretary's point. However, I am not clear about his remarks on the Commonwealth games. If I understand him correctly, it would be in order for a British citizen to practise with a larger calibre pistol abroad, but not in this country, and to compete in the games. Will that citizen be allowed to bring the higher-calibre pistol into the country, and what will he do with it when the games are over?

Mr. Howard: Clearly, if I or the holder of my office gives authority in 2002 for that event to take place—I repeat that that is one out of the five shooting events in the Commonwealth games, and that the other four events are .22 events—it will be necessary for arrangements to be made for the guns used in that event to be made available to the competitors. In the course of making those arrangements, which would have to be studied with considerable care in the context of the authority given, it would be possible for those weapons to be made available for the purpose of the competition to all the competitors in that event. That is the answer to the point raised by the right hon. Member for Dudley, East (Dr. Gilbert).

Mr. Leigh: I must press my right hon. and learned Friend on this point. There is a logical absurdity here. Surely my right hon. and learned Friend, with his inquiring and highly intelligent mind, can see that.

We are now saying to British sportsmen that they can use guns but not practise with them. It is like saying to my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) that he can run the 100 metres but that he cannot practise it. The whole thing is absurd, and it got even more absurd when my right hon. and learned Friend answered the right hon. Member for Dudley, East (Dr. Gilbert). Where will the guns be stored? World-class

sportsmen will want to use their own guns. They cannot win at that level with somebody else's gun. The whole thing is absurd. I beg my right hon. and learned Friend to reconsider.

6.15 pm

Mr. Howard: I do not accept the premise behind my hon. Friend's question. We have justified our position on the grounds that I have explained. We think that the right place to draw the line is at .22 calibre. We do not think that higher-calibre weapons ought to be permitted in this country.

I have been asked whether, exceptionally, notwithstanding the general position in relation to higher-calibre weapons, if the holder of my office were asked by the organisers of the Manchester Commonwealth games to permit that one event to take place as part of those games in 2002, it would be possible to make arrangements for that. The answer is yes; it would be possible to make arrangements for that event to continue. Of course, that does not lie very easily with the generality of the Bill; I entirely accept that.

It is not the intention that, when the Bill is enacted, higher-calibre weapons should be used. But if it is the desire of the organisers of the Commonwealth games, on that one occasion and for that one event, for special arrangements to be made, special arrangements could be made, as I have explained to the right hon. Member for Dudley, East and my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh).

I have sought to explain to the Committee the reasons why I do not believe that the amendments should be accepted. They would allow higher-calibre weapons to be available and to be used. Although, as I have said, it is true that higher-calibre weapons have a competitive use, they are capable of using much more powerful ammunition, and they are indistinguishable from .32 handguns, which are frequently used in crime. For those reasons, I invite the Committee to reject the amendments.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I am not an expert on the .32 wadcutter, but I understand that there are a number of competition weapons that are chambered precisely and only for a type of ammunition that is, in effect, a disc for marking a target. No criminal with any skill would contemplate the use of such a weapon or such a bullet—if I can call it that, because it is not a bullet—for criminal purposes.

The advice that my hon. and learned Friend has received on velocity and so on is incorrect. Many higher-calibre weapons have a smaller net power than some .22s. I should like to go into the matter in greater detail, perhaps in correspondence.

Mr. Graham: My sister-in-law has been held up in a shop five or six times in her life. What happened was that a guy came in and held a gun at her. Does the hon. Gentleman think that my sister-in-law asked, "Is that a .22?" Does he think that the criminal cared? For goodness' sake!

Sir Jerry Wiggin: The hon. Gentleman is making the mistake of confusing legally held guns with illegally held guns. There is nothing in favour of illegal weapons. We condemn illegal weapons as much as anyone. I doubt that the person who held up the hon. Gentleman's sister-in-law was carrying a legally held firearm.

I shall seek to put my right hon. and learned Friend right on the technical points. I shall not press the amendment to a vote tonight, in the hope that, if we can produce the necessary technical evidence, he will give the matter further consideration. We are talking only about target shooting, and I believe that we can allay many of his fears. Therefore, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 16, leave out 'a small–calibre pistol'.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following: No. 15, in page 1, line 16, leave out 'small–calibre pistol' and insert

'firearm which can be dismantled'.

No. 2, in page 2, line 4, leave out subsection (6).

No. 16, in page 2, line 6, leave out from 'Act' to end of line 7 and insert

' "firearm which can be dismantled" means a firearm which may be readily dismantled into at least two separate components in such a way as to disable it from being fired.'.

Mr. Hughes: I greatly admire the way in which the issue has been handled. Ever since the Dunblane shooting, the Government and Opposition parties have worked together and treated the subject as a non-party matter on which the House of Commons could not legislate in a hurry. Lord Cullen did a remarkable job. One of his most important recommendations was to impose a timetable on the House that included time to reflect. As the debate progressed and the issues unfolded, the Government made the right decision to consider the recommendations in the Cullen report and propose what action the House should take. It is a matter for the House of Commons to decide public policy and not for a judge, no matter how eminent he may be.

The difference between myself, the Opposition and the Government is relatively small. The Government consider that it is safe to allow .22 or smaller calibre weapons to be kept in gun clubs and that all other handguns should be banned. What is the basis for that judgment? Why do the Government believe that there is a difference between .22 handguns and larger weapons?

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has advanced two arguments. First, he said that he did not wish to disrupt Olympic sport. That is a logical contention, but I wonder how much water it holds when we have been told by the shooting lobby that most of the sport will be destroyed, as will Britain's participation in some of the competitions in the Commonwealth games. If the Government are prepared to take the matter that far—and they are right to do so—the next logical step would be to ban .22 handguns as well.

Secondly, my right hon. and learned Friend claims that, if larger handguns are held in gun clubs under the new stringent conditions, gun clubs will become a more attractive target for criminals. If .22 handguns are the only guns being held in gun clubs, surely they will be a target

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for criminals. As the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) said, when his sister-in-law was held up, she did not know what calibre of gun was being used.

I have also had a gun pointed at me in Beirut by a very insistent man who wanted me to hand over a videotape. I said, "Take as many videotapes as you like." I did not stop to ask him what calibre gun he was carrying. Therefore, those two arguments do not stand up.

There is a third possible argument: presumably, there is a significant difference between the effect of .22 pistols and that of larger handguns. I have taken advice from experts on guns. They do not necessarily agree with me, but agreed to assist the debate. They tell me that the shock of being hit by a bullet from a .22 gun is considerably less and that many more bullets would have to be pumped into someone to cause death. I understand that, but a .22 weapon can still be lethal, as the Cullen report tells us. The umbrella organisation for the shooters tells us that a .22 gun can be just as lethal as a larger weapon and that in some circumstances it can be more dangerous because it is quicker to change magazines on a smaller handgun.

The Government assert that their restrictions will be enough to ensure that .22 weapons never get into general circulation. However, in the Cullen report the umbrella organisation for the shooters stated its view that no system of certification or regulation can be foolproof. In other words, no system will stop someone saying that he is going to a target shooting competition, taking his guns out and doing whatever he wants with them.

Smaller handguns are used to commit many atrocities. They are the chosen weapon of Mossad, the Special Air Services and the professional assassins. Robert Kennedy and Yitzhak Rabin were killed with .22 weapons and Ronald Reagan was nearly killed with one. The *Evening Standard* reported that last night

"A mother found her four children shot dead in their beds in North Carolina with a .22-calibre handgun, the type of weapon that the Government is refusing to ban".

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): My hon. Friend has tried to apply logic to the Government's policy, and that was an error. Is it not true that the policy was cobbled together simply to keep the Cabinet intact? That is why it is so illogical and cannot be explained in a way that the average man in the street can understand.

Mr. Hughes: I am in favour of keeping the Cabinet together and I hope that it will continue to govern us after the general election. In good government, any decision is a matter of compromise. I was coming to my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Richards: My hon. Friend makes great issue of the difference between the effectiveness of a .22 handgun and that of a higher-calibre weapon. If a Member on the Opposition Front Bench were to shoot at my hon. Friend with a .22 handgun, it would be something of a fluke were he to be killed. However, if a Member on the Opposition Front Bench were to fire at him with a 9 mm Browning, my hon. Friend would end up on the same Bench as me—much further back.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but I was referring to people who hone their skills in gun clubs and know the effect of the guns. Someone armed with a .22 weapon who is intent on committing an atrocity will know exactly how close he must be to his victims. Therefore, a tragedy such as Dunblane could happen again.

I have already stated my view that there should be a free vote on the issue, because of my stance and that of other hon. Members, particularly my hon. Friends. Otherwise, can there be any logic in the Government having taken a non-political approach to the issue?

Mr. Bill Walker: It was not the Government, but the Opposition, who made the issue political.

Mr. Hughes: I absolutely reject that contention. Those arguments are used merely to slur the good names of the people who run the Snowdrop campaign, who have not tried to make it a political issue.

The judgment on whether there should be a three-line Whip is wrong. I think that it is wrong because, plainly, from the beginning, all the signals from the Government were that the issue was non-party political. Members of Parliament were therefore entitled—indeed, in my judgment, had a duty—to find out the facts, talk to the shooting fraternity and those people who wanted to ban handguns, visit gun clubs, as I and I am sure many hon. Members did, and make up their own minds on how they should vote on the issue when it eventually came to the Floor of the House. That is what I did, and that is why I take the view that I do.

In this and other debates, it has become normal courtesy for people, whatever their view, especially those who do not want to ban any handguns, to say how much sympathy they have for the parents of the Dunblane children and the husband of Gwen Mayor. I do not believe that I have any more or any less sympathy than anybody else. In fact, I think that the words are used not to express sympathy but to excuse the way in which those people are thinking and say that the people who were involved in Dunblane and the people who lost relatives are perhaps over-emotional; although we should listen to what they say, we have to understand that perhaps they are not being as balanced as they should be.

I reject that view entirely. That is not the view of the people of Dunblane. They have looked at the issues. They do not think that their relatives can be brought back, but they recognise that if we leave handguns in the hands of private citizens, as, regrettably, the Government's proposals would, we run the risk that once again a tragedy could be caused by legally held weapons. I think that the House should recognise that that is so and not have a further atrocity or the possibility of one on its conscience.

6.30 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) on his speech, on his courage in following his judgment and his conscience and on resisting whatever strong-arm tactics have been used by his party managers. That stands well for him.

This debate involves a moment of critical decision for the House of Commons.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: For the sake of clarity, I ought to say that there have been no strong-arm tactics employed by the Whips or by my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench. They have been extremely courteous and logical in their approach to me.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) should withdraw his comment.

Mr. Robertson: Of course I withdraw the comment. The hon. Member for Harrow, West was a Whip, and if he says that there has been no pressure put on hon. Members, that is good. I hope, therefore, that what I am going to say will be all the more relevant for that.

In paragraph 1.13 of his report, Lord Cullen said:

"I point out that the ultimate decision raises a number of matters of policy which are peculiarly for the Government and Parliament to decide. For that reason I direct my recommendation to what should be considered."

This evening, the House of Commons has to make its own decision; it has to come to its own judgment. I hope that if there is no restraint—that what the hon. Member for Harrow, West says, to which the Government Front-Bench team nods animatedly, is correct—Conservative Members will suffer no penalty if, having listened to the debate, they come to a different conclusion from the one that, as has been indicated to the press, the Government have drawn.

In many ways, Parliament itself is on trial tonight. If we were to leave a loophole in the firearms law big enough for another mass murderer, another Michael Ryan or Thomas Hamilton, to walk through, we would never be forgiven or deserve to be forgiven by the populace. Today, in another continent, another country, another culture—America—four children were shot dead by their father using a .22 weapon. The children died, and they make a horrifying point for us at the beginning of this debate.

I suggest that we should start by being brutally truthful with ourselves. I ask hon. Members this question: if a mad, crazed, suicidal gunman with 743 rounds of ammunition had come into the Chamber, killed 17 Members of Parliament and gravely injured 15 others and then shot himself within a matter of minutes, would we have waited eight months to discuss a partial ban on the very instrument that killed so many legislators of this land? No; whatever the Home Secretary says, the answer to that is known in the House of Commons and outside.

Sir Michael Marshall (Arundel): I understand the hon. Gentleman's argument, but he is realistic and must surely accept that there is no way in which we can close all loopholes. We would have to ban all guns. The sawn-off shotgun has been seen over the years as the criminal's friend. Surely the hon. Gentleman should give up the idea that we can close all loopholes against lunacy.

Mr. Robertson: I hesitate before calling the hon. Gentleman complacent, but I have to make the point to him that Thomas Hamilton and Michael Ryan were in a category of killers who took the lives of more people than the total of practically all other homicides in the country in a year, and did so using legally held handguns. If a 100 per cent. ban had been in place and the loophole closed, neither of them would have been able to do what they did. A balance of risks is involved. The Government have gone beyond the Cullen recommendation because they believe that the balance of risks determined it. I am suggesting that the Government's limit of 80 per cent. is not enough and that we should simply close the loophole by a 100 per cent. ban.

Mr. Howard: A few moments ago, the hon. Gentleman made an absolutely outrageous suggestion, which demeans him and the House of Commons. I want to give him the opportunity to withdraw it. He alleged that, if what had happened at Dunblane had happened in this House, we would not have waited eight months before legislating. Did not the shadow Home Secretary, his hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), and the whole Labour party accept from the outset that the right course would be to set up the Cullen inquiry, wait for its report and then legislate speedily in response to that report, which is precisely what the Government have done? Will the hon. Gentleman now withdraw his outrageous remark?

Mr. Robertson: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman would listen to me, he would realise that I am not accusing him. I am taking responsibility for all of us. Yes, of course, we waited eight months; we waited for Cullen to respond. I am questioning whether, if such an incident had happened in Parliament, we would still be talking about a partial ban on the guns. What if the instrument of death used at Dunblane primary school on 13 March had been a .22 weapon? What if it had been a Revolter .22 with eight-shot magazines? Would we still be considering a partial ban on the weapon that caused that atrocity or could have caused an atrocity in this House? I think that we know the obvious answer.

Mr. Richards *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: Many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-East (Mr. Richards), have asked whether, somehow, the .22 is different from the .32 or the Magnums that some people have at present. Eileen Harrild was the gym teacher at Dunblane primary school. She is in the House of Commons and what she has said today should be a salutary reminder to all of us. She did not know whether Thomas Hamilton had a 9 mm Browning or a .22 weapon in that gymnasium. All she knew was that he killed with it.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman meant to say what he did to the Committee, but it is quite important that he puts the position on the record. Surely he is not for a moment suggesting that the reaction of the House of Commons to the murder of 16 children and their teacher would be any different if a crime had been committed in the House involving 17 Members of Parliament. Surely the House would react to such an atrocity, wherever it happened, in the same way, by looking at the facts and forming a balanced and proper response. It is important that the hon. Gentleman should make that clear.

Mr. Robertson: The right hon. Gentleman and I have stood side by side during the whole episode and I do not regret that for a moment, but we have arrived at a different

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conclusion at this stage and that is the point that I make solemnly and seriously to the Committee. After all that time, all that consideration and all the evidence that has been collected, it is not right that we should concern ourselves with a partial ban on that sort of weapon. If the events had been closer to the House, the partialness of the ban would be the issue, as it is today.

The decision is a matter of judgment. We saw so much on that day and we have seen so much since then, but we see a difference of judgment before the Committee tonight. The amendment on which we will vote is not in the name of the Labour party; it is first in the name of three right hon. and hon. Conservative Members and it has support across the Committee. The point has been made repeatedly, but why will the Government not allow—

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we have stood side by side on this issue, and I am grateful for the way in which he has done that, but it is important that he should make it clear that the House of Commons is not treating the events of Dunblane any less seriously than it would treat the events had they taken place in the House. That is what he appeared to say and it is important that he should make it clear that the House of Commons is treating the events of Dunblane as seriously as if they had happened anywhere else. We may disagree on the appropriate response, but it is wrong to suggest that the response would have been different if those events had happened here in Westminster and not in my constituency.

Mr. Robertson: I make the point to the right hon. Gentleman that the issue is a question of judgment, and I am not the only one who makes that suggestion. Yes, we decided collectively that the Cullen inquiry would be set up and that we would wait to see the results before we came to a considered conclusion, but there is now a serious difference between us. It is a small difference, but it is a fundamental. I do not personally believe that, had the events taken place here or had the gun that was used in Dunblane primary school been a .22 weapon, we would now be considering a partial ban that would continue to allow 20,000 .22 calibre pistols, half of them semi-automatic, to remain in legal circulation. That is my judgment and I believe it is shared by many other hon. Members.

Mr. Richards *rose—*

Mr. Dicks *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks).

Mr. Dicks: At the time the hon. Gentleman, my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition went to Dunblane, soon after the tragedy, the implication was—I may be wrong—that everybody would do all that could be done to ensure that such events would not happen again. I am disappointed that that has not happened and that is why we have a partial ban and not the complete ban that the hon. Gentleman and I want.

Mr. Robertson: In the ideal world, we would all have followed the same route together and we would have come to exactly the same conclusions, but we do not live in an ideal world. The hon. Gentleman's party is not ideal, because his colleagues do not agree with his courageous view. There is an honest difference of opinion and the House of Commons has an opportunity to consider what action will be taken.

Mr. Richards *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: This is a brief debate and I have to make some progress. I have given way generously up to now and I may come to the hon. Gentleman later.

The issue before us is that guns kill and handguns kill more easily, more quickly and with devastating effect. The .22 guns are as lethal as the higher-calibre guns that will be outlawed here tonight. I say in all seriousness—this is not a political point—that there is genuine dismay and concern in the country that there is a whipped vote on one side of the Committee but a free vote on the other. It is right to ask again and again how the Government can announce only some eight days ago that they will allow a free vote on an issue such as corporal punishment in English schools, but can maintain that it is unreasonable that Tory Members of Parliament should be allowed to follow their consciences this evening on this, of all important issues.

Over the past 17 years, the Government have allowed free votes on Sunday trading and abortion and will now allow one on caning. Of course, we always allow a free vote on Members' pay, but we are told—perhaps because the Government believe that the vote might go against them tonight—that Tory Members of Parliament are to bury their consciences and follow the considered line of the Government. It is a sad and dismal commentary on the Government's sense of priorities that they have chosen to give no discretion to Conservative Members, and I congratulate those who have chosen to break ranks.

6.45 pm

The President of the Board of Trade was on "Any Questions" last Friday night with my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell). The question why there would be no free vote was posed by a puzzled audience in Troon and the right hon. Gentleman said that it was traditional that free votes be allowed when great life issues were to be determined; he quoted abortion and capital punishment. If leaving a loophole in handgun law that allows 20,000 .22 pistols to be kept—half of which are semi-automatics—is not a great life issue, the right hon. Gentleman should go to the cemeteries of Dunblane and Hungerford and ask himself the question again.

I plead with Conservative Members and hon. Gentlemen in other parties to consider tonight the effectiveness and the security of the law that we are about to enact over the next couple of months. I hope that they will let their judgment, and not that of the Whips, determine the way in which they will vote. The debate is about more than just the technicalities of gun clubs, the disassembly of weapons, the transport regulations between clubs or even the quantum of compensation. It is a defining moment for what sort of society we want today. Is there a gun culture in this country? Should we be worried about a gun culture developing? Lord Cullen, in paragraph 9.44, said that high-calibre guns

"are not target guns in the true and original sense, but courses . . . have been evolved for them which make use of their greater power and other characteristics, as well as calling for agility and quick thinking on the part of the shooter. This has led to the growth of combat shooting. It has led some shooters to don the trappings of combat, such as holsters and camouflage clothing. It has caused others"—

I emphasise this point—

"to feel uneasy about what appears to be the use of guns as symbols of personal power."

Those are chilling words from Lord Cullen. He is not just talking about Magnums and 9 mm Brownings, but about the handgun culture that seems to be growing and that disturbs many people who are involved in legitimate shooting sports. Those words should resonate with all of us.

A gentleman from Elstree in Hertfordshire sent me a copy of a letter that he had sent to the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington last week. Although the hon. Gentleman may not have noticed the letter, I took time to read what is an angry and almost incoherent letter from Mr. David M. Proctor, the owner of the Elstree forge, which supplies

"quality forged ironwork to customer's requirements".

Mr. Proctor is a member of the shooting lobby and his letter is filled with dots and exclamation marks. We all know about such letters. He says:

"However . . . we had to deal it and not take our spite and pity out on the rest of the nation or . . . a selected minority. If you are looking for blame . . . Thomas Hamilton is first in line . . . !! Second in line is the issuing authority for his gun license. Third in line are the people of Dunblane for not co-operating with the police to bring the 'bastard' to trial . . . before he went wild, instead of pelting him with eggs, flour etc, and taunting him.!!!!! Talk about kicking a dog and 'not' expecting it to bite!!."

Mr. Proctor continues:

"You would like a 'TOTAL' ban on handguns (pistols) . . . ??? fair enough . . . this is your view and opinion. For my part . . . pistol shooting is now 'dead' in the water . . . so . . . to mess about with a .22 cal rimfire . . . is of no interest to me, although I do own a .22 cal pistol as well as 9 mm etc. to 'just' shoot .22 is to as 'just' eat carrots and peas and nothing else . . . !! sorry . . . not interested . . . But . . . why then are you going to allow me to keep at home my .22 cal self-loading multi-shot . . . rapid fire rifle . . . ??? I can kill you just as easily with that, indeed, I could set myself up and 'snipe' you from a safe distance with it . . . !!!"

That is a licensed holder of three handguns and one .22 rifle offering his considered view to a Member of Parliament who chooses to support the amendment.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman has treated the Committee to two quotations, the second from a letter that was based on the assumption that .22 guns could be kept at home. Does he realise that no .22 handgun—or any other handgun—can be kept at home under the Government's proposals?

More important, the hon. Gentleman read out most of a paragraph from Lord Cullen's report, in which he talked about handgun shooting assuming the trappings of power. Does he concede that the first sentence of that paragraph reads as follows:

"Over the last 20 years there has been a considerable expansion in the use of larger calibre and high capacity handguns"?

The paragraph that he read to the Committee was not about .22 handguns but about the handguns that the Government are proposing to ban. Why was he trying to mislead the Committee by quoting that paragraph?

Mr. Robertson: I do not know whether the Home Secretary breaches the rules of order, nor do I care, but I think that he underestimates the degree to which people are worried about the gun culture. Of course the rise of the high-calibre handgun has led to certain things, but is he telling us that he does not believe that people will trade down to other weapons of death? I have shown him a brochure that I received from the secretary of the Clyde Valley pistol club, who came to lobby me and spoke against the Bill. One weapon in that brochure can be used with an eight-shot magazine. The gun culture, if it exists, will not stop because we take out some of the larger-calibre weapons.

The Home Secretary said that I read out the letter in the context of weapons at home. The gentleman who wrote this amazing letter—the third piece of correspondence that I have received from him—will still have his .22 rifle at home, a weapon that he is using to make an almost explicit threat to a Conservative Member of Parliament. Until the Bill becomes law, that man will continue to have his two 9 mm Browning weapons and his .22 pistol in his home. I state that not as a debating point, but because we must deal with what is going on in this country.

Mr. Richards: In his remarks a few moments ago, the hon. Gentleman made the highly offensive comment that hon. Members might somehow regard themselves as being more important or worthy than the children killed at Dunblane. Will he withdraw that remark?

Mr. Robertson: I do not see why the hon. Gentleman wishes to get away from the issues to which other hon. Members want to move.

Handguns are special. The Government have conceded that, as has Lord Cullen. Because they accept that point, the Government have gone beyond Lord Cullen's recommendations. The critical issue today is whether we can make our society safer simply by banning the higher-calibre guns, or whether it remains unsafe, for exactly the same reasons that the Government have put forward, to leave 20,000 .22 guns—the figure at the moment, but there is a potential for even more if the compensation is used to trade down—in legal circulation.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: No, I am coming to the end of my remarks. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman hopes to catch your eye, Sir Geoffrey.

Thomas Hamilton took 473 rounds to Dunblane primary school on 13 March. He shot 106 bullets, causing 58 wounds of which no less than 26 would have been individually fatal. He killed 17 human beings—16 of them tiny children, the other being their dedicated teacher—and he then killed himself. He did all that within three minutes of unimaginable horror. This was not a random slaughter; this was not a madman picking up for the first time a killing instrument and spraying out shots with it. This was a creature of real evil who used the skills that he gained at the gun clubs. He was the model of what Lord Cullen said was the unease that we now express about those in the combat and gun cultures.

Those children and Gwen Mayor were not killed or murdered, but were executed in an orgy of directed and precise violence by a suicidal maniac using the only instruments—rapid-fire pistols—that could have done the

[Mr. Robertson]

deed in that time, and simultaneously ended his own life. There could be no discrimination between the methods and the weapons that he used on that day, and we should not allow ourselves to place an artificial distinction between one set of these instruments of death and another set that we are prepared to continue in legitimate use.

A full ban on handguns will prevent another of these atrocities—which have happened twice within the last 10 years in our country—at the hands of maniacs using legally held guns. A full ban, as the Police Federation and the Police Superintendents Association of England and Wales have said, will be the only administrative means of implementing a policy of minimised risk in this area. A full ban is what the Committee should be voting on if we are serious about minimising the risks that face us.

There were snowdrops growing in Dunblane on that awful day in March this year. That is why the grassroots campaign—with hardly any money, but with conviction and common-sense arguments on its side—set out to make sure that no similar tragedy could affect any other small community in this country. The snowdrops will be back in bloom in March next year and the memories, which are still so fresh to so many people, will flood back to remind us and the world of what happened so close to us.

We must make the balance between a sport and whether it continues to exist, and human life and public safety. If we leave loopholes that we could have closed, if we maintain a risk that we could have avoided, if we have not done all that we could have done to prevent another atrocity, if we make a mistake, if we compromise here in this Parliament, others will pay the price. Are we capable of living with that responsibility?

Mr. David Mellor (Putney): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this important debate. During the Second Reading debate, I felt an emotion about my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary that I never thought I would feel in the context of this matter—I felt sorry for him, as he found himself assailed from both sides of the argument. Having regard to the strength of feeling among some of my hon. Friends that the measure that he proposes goes too far, it is only right, before I suggest that he should certainly go further, to recognise that if, as I hope, the measure proceeds to the statute book—with or without this amendment—largely unamended by others, it will be a significant step forward in enhancing public safety and ridding Britain of the danger of falling victim to a gun culture as part of our ready importation of American values into our way of life.

I deeply regret that, for the first time in 17 years—perhaps it shows what a craven, snivelling thing I have been for most of my career in the House—I shall vote against my party on a three-line Whip. It is fair to say that no Whip has approached me. I wish I could add for colour that some huge effort had been made to persuade me to change my mind, but the Whips Office has treated the matter as one of complete indifference. Nevertheless, I resent the fact that I am being offered a free vote in a couple of weeks on the vital question of whether little Johnny should be spanked for sticking his tongue out at teacher, while I am not being offered a free vote on what is literally a matter of life and death. I do not see the logic of that and, with the greatest of respect to those who decide these matters, I do not see the benefit to the Government. If they win tonight—maybe they will—it will be said that they did so only because they imposed a three-line Whip. They will be seen to have won the vote but lost the argument—a pyrrhic victory indeed.

7 pm

The outstanding and deeply moving occasion when the two party leaders, accompanied by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and his opposite number, the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), appeared at Dunblane was a proper sign of solidarity by the political system to mark what we all know will be a lasting stain on the history of this nation: the slaughter of 16 innocents and a teacher in Dunblane by someone whom we collectively—society—permitted to be the holder of licensed handguns. Before we hear too many other references to the unquestionably serious, but separate, issue of illegal firearms, I remind the House that Lord Cullen found as a fact that it was profoundly unlikely that Hamilton would have obtained a weapon from the illegal market had we prevented him from having a legal firearm.

Against that background, I do not understand what is so precious about the compromise that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, with his typical eloquence and attractive imperviousness to any contrary opinion—the latter is a great asset in a lawyer, but a more questionable one in a politician—is suggesting with his customary vigour. This is not a carefully considered decision by the Government, but a decision forced on them by legitimate debate within their ranks between those such as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, who no doubt took one view, and those who took another. The compromise does not reflect the views of Lord Cullen.

At least I agree with the Government that, whatever the merits of asking Lord Cullen to do something, the policy on handguns is nothing to do with the judge. Indeed, there was no spectacle more ridiculous than the Government, having accused hon. Members such as me of knee-jerk reactions when we called for changes to be made, scuttling off to brief the press that they would not accept Lord Cullen's remarks unless they went in a certain direction, and before he had even delivered the report. If I were Lord Cullen, I would feel slightly ill used.

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd (Morecambe and Lunesdale): Does my right hon. and learned Friend think that it was wrong to appoint Lord Cullen to conduct the inquiry?

Mr. Mellor: Yes, and I have said so from day one, as my hon. Friend would have known had he been active in the debate. That is my view and it may be eccentric, but it is one that I hold strongly. Judges are there to deal with the law and politicians and Members of Parliament are there to make policy. Otherwise, why bother to have a Government at all? Let us have a standing committee of the judiciary to tell us how to deal with such complex issues. Sometimes I think that they could have it, and damn good riddance to them, frankly.

The Government compromise is not some carefully selected piece of ground, but a piece to which they have been dragged by the pressure of events. I find it difficult to know why they are so attached to a compromise that

has no merit beyond the undoubted skill with which it has managed to alienate almost every party to the debate. It is extraordinary that the people who have said how unworkable and hopeless are the Government's propositions are the very people whom the Government are striving officiously to save from the ineptitude of their campaigning—the gun lobby. Why be more Catholic than the Pope on this issue? I am in some doubt as to why that should be the case.

I should have thought it self-evident that Lord Cullen—whose use in considering the evidence is in quite a different quarter from the question whether he can help us on issues of policy—points in paragraphs 9.42 and 9.43 to the deadly nature of the .22, particularly rapid-action .22s. I have seen the advertisements that the hon. Member for Hamilton cited. As a consequence of the Government's proposals, people will trade down to .22s and the evidence clearly shows that rapid-fire .22s are capable of inflicting just as much damage as Thomas Hamilton inflicted with an altogether more powerful pistol.

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. and learned Friend and I are on opposite sides on this question, but we may agree on this point. Does he accept that the compromise is rather disingenuous because it conveys the impression that sportsmen will continue to be able to use .22 pistols in large numbers, but by the Government's own admission most gun clubs will be closed down, so there will not be 20,000 guns in circulation anyway?

Mr. Mellor: I would be more reassured about the Government's proposals if I thought that that was likely to be the case, but I think it most unlikely. Some of the people who are engaged with such single-minded intensity in these activities, as some people are, will carry on. They will simply modify the weapons they use, and they will use the compensation, which I accept that they should be offered, to trade down. Before we know it, the 20 per cent. of handguns that remain will swell and we will not have struck a blow to the heart of handgun culture in our society, as I want us to do.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Is not the crux of the argument the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) about the balance of risk or risk assessment? I began by supporting the Government in the sense that I thought that retaining .22s would pose a low risk. The people in the gun lobby who have contacted me have persuaded me about the dangers of .22s. If the logic is that, for the public good, handguns should be banned, the same logic must apply to .22 handguns or to none at all.

Mr. Mellor: I agree. I cannot think why on earth the Government are so desperate to save some of these people from themselves.

The point that emerges with complete clarity from paragraph 9.44 of Lord Cullen's report, which the hon. Member for Hamilton quoted, is that the quiet British sport of target shooting has in recent years been infiltrated by people who shoot for reasons quite different from a desire to participate in the Olympic games. One of the lamentable side effects of the culture of violence spread by American entertainment in this country is some people's desire to play some part in the activities depicted on screen in their fantasies. Why else should people feel the need to dress up in combat clothing and, instead of shooting at a boring old circle on a target a long distance away, shoot at human forms using combat ammunition?

Of course the overwhelming majority of people who hold licences are to be trusted and would never do what Thomas Hamilton did, but we must ask ourselves how we are to weed out those who are playing a part in a traditional British sport and those who possess their guns as some sort of boost to a fragile ego and who are acting out some bizarre fantasy, whether at their gun club or in their home.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mellor: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will bear with me so that I can develop this point and then I will be finished. To my mind, although only perhaps to mine, this is the heart of the matter—others may not agree.

I was initially attracted to the idea, and I would be prepared to accept drawing a line at .22 weapons, if I thought that the system of vetting, which at present rejects 0.5 per cent. of applicants—when is a vetting system not a vetting system? When it lets 99.5 per cent. through—could ensure that the wrong 'uns were weeded out; but I doubt that.

The doctors have discovered the truth. The Home Affairs Select Committee, in a last desperate attempt to get the gun lobby off the hook, suggested that doctors should be wheeled in to certify people as fit; the doctors knew that they were being handed a poisoned chalice and would have none of it, so they voted against it. One of the principal mechanisms that, it was being suggested, would have obviated the need to ban a further category of weapons, went out of the window because professional people cannot be forced to do a job against their will.

I mentioned earlier the justice of the peace who hardly knew Hamilton but signed his certificate not once but twice. He gave a lengthy explanation to the Cullen inquiry, saying that he felt that it was his public duty to sign the application. Frankly, I am amazed that more attention has not focused on his role. If it was right for the assistant chief constable to resign, I can hardly feel reassured by the fact that that gentleman is still sitting on the Bench.

If we legislate to protect handguns, and if we accept that the number of handguns in the legitimate category will continue to increase, we must accept that the entire credibility of the legislation will turn on those such as that JP, who lack the moral courage to refuse to give a reference. The fact that we are introducing a positive vetting system, that people will have to establish their fitness and a reference will have to be provided is not, in my judgment, a sufficient safeguard to protect us against future Dunblanes.

What should most engage our attention is the fact that we muffed it after Hungerford, because the victims' relatives—I do not criticise them for it—did not campaign for Parliament to take a certain view, and the Government made tough proposals that, late at night, in our usual way, were watered down. Most of us—we are all guilty, as the psychiatrists say—were elsewhere when the various lobbies were doing their work. As a consequence, despite the fact that half Michael Ryan's victims were killed by

[Mr. Mellor]

a licensed handgun, we restricted the categories of weapon to be removed, so Thomas Hamilton was able to use just such a weapon to kill the youngsters of Dunblane.

Those who do not vote for a total ban tonight should ask themselves how Parliament will be able to look the electorate in the eye if someone else creeps out of the woodwork through the latest little loophole that we have left, and does something awful. It is a dreadful fact that, as far as the public are concerned, we have run out of road.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Mellor: If I may, I will first finish my point.

We have run out of road, and there is no doubt about how the public would vote on the issue tonight. If we leave a loophole and trust the very people who let us down before, we will not have made adequate redress for the ghastly tragedy that hit the community of Dunblane in March.

Sir Patrick Cormack: What happens if a farmer, who legitimately owns a shotgun, runs amok with it and kills six children in a school? Do we then ban all shotguns?

Mr. Mellor: We would have to consider that situation when we came to it—and I hope that we never will. If I were a licensed shotgun holder I would pray to every god that I recognised that that would never happen, because if it did the spotlight might shift. However, my concern is with the reality of today, in which, once again, we are creating a loophole that can be exploited.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I accept that Dunblane and Hungerford were both carried out with licensed firearms, but would not the House be better served by concentrating on the Metropolitan police survey showing that 96 per cent. of all firearms crimes involved unlicensed weapons?

Mr. Mellor: I have two points to make in reply. First, that may be a spurious figure; the Cullen report shows that its provenance is dubious. Secondly, the fact that we have a problem with illegal firearms is not an escape route for those who do not want to be properly rigorous with the conditions that we—in a society that is not the United States and does not recognise any right to bear arms—impose to deal with our problem with legal firearms, now that it has been thrust in front of us in a way that even the most thick-headed and insensitive of us cannot ignore.

The tragedy of Dunblane will not go away; it is a continuing stain on our national conscience. I have done my best, with whatever logic is at my disposal, and drawing on my experience in the Home Office, to ask myself whether we can possibly justify the maintenance of legally held handguns in our society. The answer that I reach—at least in my version of logic—is that we cannot.

7.15 pm

I want to say something that might strike some people as emotional. I had never visited Dunblane before March; I knew nothing of it. Over the past months it has been a privilege for me to come to know some of the people of Dunblane, some of the bereaved parents and those who have worked with them in the Snowdrop campaign. I congratulate that campaign on the measured manner in which it has insisted that the issue will not go away and that the House will have to address it with both sides—not just the well-organised lobby, but the public interest—being represented.

I must tell my right hon. and hon. Friends that it was not our finest hour when we appeared to make an enemy of two women, both of whom—do not forget that we are talking Scotland here—voted Conservative in the general election. Ann Pearston made a wonderful speech at the Labour party conference; she would have made an equally wonderful speech at ours, had she been invited to do so, and it is not her fault that our rules do not allow such an event. There is no party political plot behind the Snowdrop campaign.

Anyone with any power of imagination must know how ghastly it must be to have a five-year-old child who goes off to school one day only to be blown away by a thing such as Hamilton that we, collectively, permitted to have a handgun. It cannot be easy for people with such an experience to come out from their vale of tears and appear on the media, exposing themselves and their families to all the scrutiny.

I have been deeply moved by my meetings with those people. I do not want those who take a more detached view to say that I am simply being emotional, but I want to tell the House what one bereaved father said to me. He said, "If I am able to secure a complete ban on handguns, I think I can put all this behind me, but if we do not achieve a complete ban, I do not think I shall ever be able to get over it."

That is not the only reason for making a change, but if we accept that we, collectively, bear responsibility for the state of the law and that we cannot merely say that it was a stupid policeman's fault that a known misfit such as Hamilton had a handgun certificate and could keep a small arsenal at home, we must acknowledge that we owe the victims and their families some redress.

I believe in logic, but let us never be embarrassed in a society such as ours to display emotion at such moments. Logic and emotion irresistibly build up to the fact that, after two massacres in less than 10 years—when 10 years ago we would have assumed that incidents like the Texas university massacre could not happen here—we are fully justified in saying, away with handguns. For heaven's sake, let us take that step tonight.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): We have heard three powerful speeches, all on the same side of the argument, on the amendment so ably moved by the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes). I wish to add a fourth.

I disagree slightly with the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), who said that the Bill, even if the amendment were not made, would none the less be an improvement on the present law.

The Bill is unfinished business. If it is not amended, it will have to be revisited for the reason to which both the hon. Member for Harrow, West and the right hon. and learned Member for Putney alluded: that the compromise that has been struck is illogical and unsustainable. That has been compounded by the fact that the Government

have not allowed a free vote. The Government should have used the now established machinery of allowing the House to consider several options with a free vote. That would have given us a much better chance of getting the real view of the Committee and securing legislation that would have stood the test of time. If the Bill passes unamended, it will not stand the test of time. If there is a change of Government in the next sixth months, I think that the House will be reconsidering the matter shortly after the next general election.

The Cullen report was a valuable and proper way for the Government to respond to what happened. It made a substantial contribution to informing the debate. Reading it opened a vista for me in respect of the background to and circumstances of the gun clubs and other interested groups. I was taken aback at the extent to which handguns are being used—and being used more and more. The hon. Member for Harrow, West mentioned the developing atmosphere and culture described in the Cullen report. That was something new and worrying to me. For that reason alone, the report was a useful contribution to the debate.

The decision facing the House is, as the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) said, a basic balance of judgment. As a Liberal with both a small "l" and a capital "L", I hate banning anything. We must have clear ideas and justifications before we ban something. In debating the money resolution, we mentioned an important part of the balance of the argument. I make no apology for returning to the importance of the necessary fairness of proper compensation for those who will be deprived of the ability to shoot handguns if the Bill is passed and the amendment accepted.

It is not only a question of the loss to individuals or of the ancillary and storage equipment or of the .22 guns that will be rendered virtually useless by the compromise that the Government have decided to recommend. I was surprised, nay amazed, that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) made it clear that Labour believes that companies, firms or clubs that lose money as a direct or indirect result of the legislation should not be considered for compensation. That is regrettable; indeed, it is incomprehensible. During the Bill's passage, we must give more attention to provisions on museum, research and other historically notable weapons.

Having listened to the argument and way in which the amendment was moved by the hon. Member for Harrow, West, I have concluded that we must take action to eradicate handgun culture. That does not mean only legally held weapons. Attempts to deal with illegally held weapons as well as legally held ones are not mutually exclusive. As part of the fairness to the people who are being deprived of the ability to use handguns by the legislation, we owe it to them to say that best endeavours and urgent action will be taken; that no stones will be left unturned in trying to deal with the unacceptably high number of illegally held weapons as part and parcel of this process. If we were able to tell those people that we had achieved some success in doing that, they would be more reconciled to the loss that they are being forced to sustain by the legislation. I do not know why the Government do not actively consider a permanent amnesty, whether or not a bounty is involved, for illegally held handguns. I am surprised that they have not used the debate to make sensible suggestions on that.

Having considered the balance of probabilities and examined the options available, a vital element in making me decide that the amendment should be passed is the size of the guns. Clause 1 talks about firearms with an overall length of less than 60 cm or with a barrel length of less than 30 cm. The uniqueness of such handguns is their concealability. It is impossible to make provisions to deal with outrages such as Dunblane if there are lethal weapons that small. Of course, there are difficulties with other sorts of firearms, and no doubt we shall discuss rifles and so on in the future.

The concealability of small weapons makes them difficult to guard against with proper security provisions in schools or elsewhere. The right hon. and learned Member for Putney mentioned the environment that gives people the ability to practise with such weapons to develop a skill that can be used with devastating results. We must consider those factors, together with the potential loopholes in the registration and certification process and those in respect of mental illness, about which no one can make secure and certain guarantees. The balance of risk, when one considers all those matters, must be against its remaining possible for people to use legally registered handguns.

The risk of a repetition of an incident with a legally held gun is an intolerable prospect. Even if, as an individual, I were willing to allow people to use handguns for sporting and other pursuits, as a legislator it is unconscionable to vote against the amendment. Who can say that another legally held handgun will not cause death? As a legislator, that is an impossible position for me and I cannot contemplate it. The only way in which we can guarantee that legally held handguns will never again be used in such incidents is to ban them. That is what I propose to vote for and what I recommend to the Committee.

Sir Patrick Cormack: The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) said that he was the fourth contributor in a row to take the same line. I shall be the first to take a rather different one. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) made a most powerful and eloquent speech. No one who heard it could fail to have been moved by it. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) spoke with fervour, eloquence and great persuasive power in moving the amendment. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) introduced some of the subjects that he did, but I realise that he must feel personally involved, living as he does in Dunblane. There is no reason why any hon. Member should ever have to apologise for being emotional when we debate such issues.

I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney on two things at least. Compromises are untidy and generally unsatisfactory. I agree also that free votes are desirable in situations such as this. Since I entered the House, I have tried to treat every vote as a free one, though it has not got me very far. There are occasions when the Whips should be off in every sense, and this is one of them.

I do not want to take up too much of the House's time, so I shall address some, but not all, of the points raised by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney in his fine speech. When he was courteous enough, as he always is, to allow me to intervene, I asked him a

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

question about a farmer with a shotgun. He responded by saying, "Well, yes, perhaps we would have to look at that example." That revealed the irrefutable logic—*[Interruption.]*—I wish that the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) would be quiet—at the base of the campaign.

7.30 pm

Of course every firearm is potentially dangerous. Every weapon can be used to maim and, in most cases, to kill. I have a shotgun licence, and I have a shotgun. Many people in this country legitimately use shotguns and rifles for country sports. The vast majority of those who own such weapons are law-abiding, sensible and sober citizens. The same is true of most people who indulge in shooting with handguns as a sport. To draw upon the phrase used by my right hon. and learned Friend, we have to weed out others by deciding who should own and use such guns. He is quite right to say that there is shared guilt if anyone like a Ryan or a Hamilton is allowed to possess weapons.

I have long felt that there should be at least two signatures to countersign any application for any licence or certificate. I still believe that to be the case. I believe that it would be ideal if one of those signatures were that of a medical practitioner, although I take the point that my right hon. and learned Friend made in his speech.

As I understand the Bill, there will still be a requirement for one signature for an application for a shotgun licence. As the possessor of such a licence, I say to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary that there should be two, because there have been examples of farmers turning shotguns on members of their family and killing people. We can all think of such examples. There was a particularly terrible case in Wales about 18 months ago—I note that the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) nods in agreement.

I believe strongly that there should be a closer vetting process. I also believe strongly, however, that our country would be the poorer if all legitimate country sports were outlawed. To treat those who engage in legitimate sports as though they were all potential criminals does no service to society.

As I said in an earlier brief intervention, I believe that there is a duty incumbent upon the Committee to seek to be objective. That is not to say that we cannot understand and share the emotions expressed, or feel the shame, distress and all the other emotions that we experienced on that terrible March day, which none of us will ever forget. When we are legislating, however, we must seek to be objective. Unless we are to say that because guns can kill no one shall ever legally own one again, we must look at what we intend to allow.

There should be a tighter vetting process for all firearms, including those used for legitimate country sporting purposes. I accept, of course, that handguns are easier to conceal and can be more devastating in their effect. I believe that all handguns should be held in legally registered, tightly secured premises. If those who wish to operate those premises cannot meet the stringent requirements that society has a right that Parliament should demand, well, tough luck—they should close those premises.

I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney about certain other matters. For example, I believe that it is obscene to have targets of the human form. It is appalling for people to dress up in combat rig and behave Rambo-fashion. I would weed those people out. I would make everyone who currently holds a licence or a certificate reapply. I would be tough. I would not seek, however, to brand all legitimate sportsmen as potential criminals.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Who does?

Sir Patrick Cormack: Those who are in favour of a total ban on handguns, I fear.

I believe that it is extremely important that we do not brand all those engaged in country sports as potential criminals.

Mr. Winnick: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He is usually the last hon. Member to distort the argument. Will he therefore accept that those who want a total ban on handguns, and who will vote accordingly, would not for one moment take the view of which he has just accused us? I believe that I speak for colleagues on both sides of the House on that. We do not believe that those who are engaged in such sporting activities are potential criminals. I believe nothing of the kind and it does not strengthen the hon. Gentleman's argument to accuse us of something of which we certainly are not guilty.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I was not accusing the hon. Gentleman or those who take that line. I am sure that that is not their intention, but that is the effect. That is the difference.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney and the four preceding contributors in the debate said that we cannot risk another Dunblane, and that we do not know who might commit such a crime. My solution is at least as logical as that of my right hon. and learned Friend. I call for the strongest vetting procedure and the most careful supervision. I would insist that every handgun be kept in secure and proper premises, but we should not outlaw a sport or penalise those who derive perfectly legitimate pleasure from it.

As has been said, one must recognise that many of those who engage in sports with handguns are themselves severely handicapped. It is the one thing that they can do, as was attested to in a moving letter that was read out earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards).

I believe that the Bill is an untidy compromise, but I will support the Government because it goes some way towards achieving a position of common sense and objectivity. Much as I admired the eloquence of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney, and much as I found his speech compelling, I cannot agree with him, for one reason above all else, which was contained in his answer to my intervention: where do we stop if we have further examples of crimes committed in the way that I suggested?

As the Bill makes rapid progress through the House, which it rightly should, I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will give some further

thought and consideration to the points on vetting that I have raised. I appreciate that they are not appropriate for a full debate now, but they are not unimportant.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I shall speak to amendments Nos. 15 and 16, but I recognise that we are currently debating amendment No. 1, which brings us to the nub of this highly emotive argument.

We have heard the paranoid reaction of gun clubs and the supporters of gun sports, who feel that they are a threatened and persecuted minority. We have heard powerful and emotive speeches from the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) and from my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson). It is right that we should share the emotions of the people of Dunblane, but it is also right that we, as Members of Parliament, should approach this difficult legislation, not in an emotional state of mind, but in a rational one.

My argument is that the proposals in amendments Nos. 15 and 16, which further the principle of dismantling weapons as a means of control, are a far more rational and effective way of achieving our objective. After all, we began to approach the situation rationally by appointing Lord Cullen to conduct an inquiry. That is a proper way of proceeding, and we should have done it after Hungerford. The right hon. and learned Member for Putney might have criticised the appointment of a judge, but an inquiry is, in itself, a rational process.

Lord Cullen himself suggested dismantlement in his conclusions. He said:

"I am satisfied that of all the measures which stop short of a ban"—

he did not propose a ban—

"the one which is open to the least objection on the ground of practicability is the temporary dismantling of self-loading pistols".

That is Lord Cullen's suggestion, so it is right that we should consider it more seriously than we have done up to now. That is why I am proposing dismantling in my amendments, and why I shall continue to pursue the principle. It is also right that the Government should deal seriously with the proposal, which they have not done so far.

The Government's reply to Lord Cullen's suggestion was a little disingenuous—I hope that the Home Secretary will forgive me for saying so. It was an inadequate reply. I sensed that they were on weak ground from their approach to the same issue last week on Second Reading, especially when the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), refused to take any interventions on that point. She recognised that she was on weak ground.

In their reply, the Government dealt with a subsidiary part of Lord Cullen's argument. Lord Cullen said:

"In exceptional cases it"—

dismantlement—

"would not be practicable for some pistols and some revolvers. The exact extent to which that would be the case is a matter of detail. The solution to it, short of banning such handguns, would be to require barrel blocks".

The Government concentrated their reply on the practicability—or, in their view, impracticability—of barrel blocks and did not deal with the substantive issue.

Mr. Howard *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Mitchell: The Secretary of State shakes his head, but all that was said on the substantive issue was that not all handguns could be dismantled. That is not exactly true.

I am not a gun enthusiast and I know nothing about guns, but I want us to approach the issue rationally and calmly. In fact, 95 per cent. or more of handguns can be dismantled.

Mr. Howard *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Mitchell: If the Secretary of State knows otherwise, why does he not tell us what proportion of handguns, and what specific makes, cannot be dismantled? If we can achieve the effective control we want through the principle of dismantling, we have a responsibility to do so. If the Government do not accept that method, I want to know why not. They must express, defend and justify their approach better than they have until now.

The Government rested their case on the fact certain handguns cannot be dismantled, but such weapons form a minute proportion of the range of handguns available. Amendment No. 15 covers that issue by proposing that any handgun that cannot be dismantled should be banned. If dismantling is to be the principle of control, it is easy and straightforward to ban those handguns that cannot be dismantled and so fit into that control system; having done that, we can then provide for the dismantling of all other handguns. It is an extremely simple, straightforward, effective and logical method of control.

The Government have not explained their case adequately, which makes me believe that they are acting according to some principle other than rational consideration in respect of the Bill. I still cannot understand why we cannot legislate to ensure that part of a gun should be kept at a gun club and part—inevitably the smaller part, which is the cylinder in a pistol and the slide in a revolver—should be taken home, so that the two parts can only be reunited and so make a working handgun in the club, under supervision and in licensed and controlled conditions. That would achieve all that we want to achieve. Our aim is to prevent access to and the use of handguns outside clubs—to prevent another Dunblane—and we would achieve that by legislating for the principle of dismantling.

7.45 pm

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): Is it not true that that would be safer than having large accumulations of guns in one place? My right hon. and learned Friend argues that people would buy duplicate slides or cylinders to fit in their guns, but, if they are prepared to go to such lengths, they will probably buy illegal weapons anyway. Will the hon. Gentleman also bear in mind the fact that the pure solution put forward by Cullen is a great deal cheaper in terms of compensation?

Mr. Mitchell: I shall bear that point in mind—it certainly would be cheaper. The right hon. Gentleman makes the valid point that control by dismantling would prevent the storage of piles of whole weapons at gun clubs, which might be subject to burglary, ram-raiding or some other form of theft. If the dismantling proposal is accepted, any thief—whether stealing from the club or from the home of a gun owner—would find only useless parts of guns. If the argument is that owners will purchase duplicate parts, that can easily be prevented through an effective and properly administered licensing system. All the arguments point toward dismantling.

[Mr. Mitchell]

If the principle of dismantling were embodied in legislation, to carry a complete gun outside would, in itself, be an offence; that would make it easier to control illegal guns—an issue that the Government have not addressed. Any gun that was outside in a whole and working condition would be illegal, and could be dealt with effectively and, I hope, powerfully.

Mr. Robert Banks: The hon. Gentleman must know that the Government took evidence from the Forensic Science Service to justify their criticism of Cullen's proposal of dismantling weapons as a means of solving the problem. The letter from the Forensic Science Service is in the Library. It says that the small screw that is the retaining part for the side plate of a common revolver could easily be lost or disfigured, and that a special screwdriver with an accurately ground tip would be required to remove or replace it.

Such problems can easily be overcome—anyone with any sense would keep a spare retaining screw and would have an appropriate screwdriver—but is not the real point that it would be perfectly feasible to allow weapons that can be dismantled to be licensed, and to permit them to be fired in clubs when the two parts are put together? It is as simple as that.

Mr. Mitchell: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. When I saw that point in the Government's reply, I thought that, if that was the level of argument that the Government were to use to put their case, it was pathetic—to cite the possible loss of small screws is to debase logical and rational debate.

What is proposed by dismantling is more effective, in that it prevents access to complete and working handguns outside clubs; and it is less draconian, in that it allows the sport to continue and guns to be used in controlled conditions. Although the right hon. and learned Member for Putney showed some distaste for gun clubs as the embodiment of the gun culture, I have to say to him that the gun culture is independent of gun clubs, and we cannot deal with it through legislation. We have to use education, effective control of violence on television, and other means of mobilising society against the gun culture.

Dismantling as a means of control would allow a legitimate sport to continue. If we can allow the sport to continue while preventing access to working guns outside, we should do so. The onus should be on allowing those people to continue enjoying their sport if possible while avoiding tragedies such as Dunblane.

As the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) said, the proposal is less expensive. I do not know what the compensation bill will be as a result of the measure. It could be as high as £100 million, and if we accept tonight the principle of banning all guns—.22 calibre and less—it will be even more substantial. We could avoid that huge and unknown expense by taking a much more rational approach. If we rush into legislation without considering it properly, it will be messy.

I have a problem, as amendment No. 1 appears before my amendment. We have tried to get round that problem, but have not succeeded, so we shall vote on amendment No. 1. What shall I do about amendment No. 1 when I want to vote for my amendment No. 15, to which we may well have to return?

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): It is a quandary.

Mr. Mitchell: Yes, it is.

I cannot avoid the cynical thought that the Government are hoping to limit the compensation bill by limiting the ban on handguns to weapons over .22 on the grounds that, if they do that, the .22 weapons and the gun clubs will wither on the vine.

I have talked to members of Grimsby gun and pistol club, who share my suspicion. Membership of that club has decreased, and it has had to take out large overdrafts. Like other gun clubs, it will have to meet stringent and extremely expensive safety requirements at a time when membership is falling, which will give it financial problems.

If the Government can get rid of most of the .22s and the gun clubs through the provisions outlined in the Bill, they will not have to pay compensation. That may be a cynical thought, but one has such thoughts about the Government from time to time. I hate having to say that, and it is cruel to the Government, but that will almost certainly be one of the consequences of the legislation. I am in a quandary over how to vote on amendment No. 1, particularly if I take a cynical view about what the Government are doing.

I do not wish to continue that argument now, as I shall make my own decision. But surely we should have looked longer and harder at the effective and rational way of achieving the objective we all want.

The method would be a little more difficult to administer than a complete ban, but, if we did not introduce a complete ban, but approached the problem via dismantling weapons, we could make huge financial savings. We can achieve our objective—an effective ban on working handguns outside gun clubs—through dismantling. The principle of dismantling allows us to achieve our aim more cheaply, effectively and rationally, while allowing the sport to continue more effectively. We should adopt that approach.

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd (Morecambe and Lunesdale): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), as I wish to support him. First, however, I shall say a few words about emotion.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) made a powerful argument, with great passion and eloquence. My hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) correctly said that we must allow emotion to enter such debates—I fully understand that it would be an insult to those involved in the terrible tragedy that we are discussing were we not to allow emotion to enter our debates—but, ultimately, a rational decision has to be made.

The most powerful emotion must come from the bereaved parents, but we are dealing with another sort of emotion—with a minority interest that is severely threatened by the Government's proposals. Although the level of deprivation is ridiculously small in comparison with that of the parents of the Dunblane children, there is a level of deprivation involved.

When I visited Morecambe rifle and pistol club in my constituency in July, one or two of its members were very near to tears at the tragedy of Dunblane and the horror of the experience that the nation had been through. One or two members were terribly emotional at the threat to what they rightly regarded as a perfectly legitimate sporting interest—they described to me the skills involved. It was not my first visit to the rifle club; I had made an earlier visit a few years before. I have been in contact with it for a number of years, as one of its members is articulate and keeps in touch with me.

I was frank with the club members, and told them that I would support Lord Cullen's recommendations, on which I thought the Government would base their legislative proposals. The members were reasonably accepting of my view; some of them felt that I should act in accordance with my conscience, but I said that we appointed judges of distinction to give us guidance, and that we should follow Lord Cullen's recommendations. The meeting ended on that note, and I believe that the people I saw were reluctantly willing to accept Lord Cullen's conclusions. However, they feel unhappy about the measures that the Government have decided to introduce following Lord Cullen's report.

One reason that they felt that what I was saying in July was probably good advice was that I had received from my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, a letter containing the magic words. It said that the Government would have to

"strike the right balance between the legitimate rights of shooters and public safety".

We all know that that comment does not have a precise meaning, but it is slightly loaded: it talks about the legitimate rights of shooters when a large measure of their sporting activity would not be made illegal. My disappointment at the Government's proposals—I have so far been loyal to the Government when voting—is that, as the hon. Member for Great Grimsby said, they did not accept Lord Cullen's recommendations.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney feels that Lord Cullen should never have been appointed, but he concedes that the report was right in evaluating the evidence—we both agree on that. Those who feel that Lord Cullen's report should have been limited to the evidence are stretching my imagination. I cannot believe that a man of Lord Cullen's distinction could be expected to evaluate the evidence and not come up with a conclusion.

In addition, when strong feelings are expressed by those who have suffered terrible tragedy, the purpose of appointing someone of Lord Cullen's distinction to make recommendations is to get behind the emotional pressure and try to see the arguments on which rational decisions will ultimately be based. I am sure that all those associated with the Dunblane inquiry would, as we do, pay the highest tribute to Lord Cullen for the way in which he has conducted the proceedings. The Government rightly appointed Lord Cullen to make recommendations in order to get behind the emotions. I am sad that those recommendations have not been followed.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby spoke about dismantlement of weapons. As he said, the Government's answer to his proposal is that it is feasible to dismantle some weapons but not a practical proposition for others. The first question that one must ask when that argument is deployed is, "What are the numbers? How many weapons is it feasible to dismantle, and how many weapons is it not?"

As it happens, I wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary on the very day that he made his statement, to ask that question. I know that he has been burdened with work, and I have not yet received a reply—

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Nor have I.

8 pm

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: Nor has the hon. Member for Great Grimsby.

The House is entitled to a statistical explanation of that very important fact tonight, as are those of my constituents who attend the Morecambe rifle and pistol club. If the Government were to say, "Some weapons can be dismantled, so we shall allow their use under stringent controls in gun clubs, but we are afraid that the others, which cannot be dismantled, must be destroyed," at least that would be a rational position.

We must not allow the issue of dismantlement of weapons to be clouded by the issue of the barrel lock that does not really work. I am not pursuing that; I do not have enough technical knowledge of the subject. I do know, however, that, if one dismantles a weapon and puts one piece in one place and another piece in another, one cannot use it, unless—this is the Government's argument—one feels that the missing part, the slide assembly or the cylinder, could be manufactured or acquired.

The answer to that argument—I am entitled to a careful explanation if I am wrong—is, "Yes, but one would be breaking the law. If one had that part surreptitiously without disclosing it on one's licence or seeking permission to have it, one would be breaking the law." Once again we are back in a position where we are talking of people who would be already breaking the law, as it would be if it were as the hon. Member for Grimsby has advocated in amendment No. 15.

That is not a powerful argument against amendment No. 15; nor is it a powerful argument to say that people could, once again, legally manufacture weapon parts in their homes and go out and use them as horrible weapons of terror. First, it is very difficult to manufacture the parts of a weapon; one needs to be highly skilled. Secondly, there are many much easier methods of obtaining those horrible weapons of violence that may be used in such a way, if that is the intention of the perpetrator of such a crime.

Of course the Government are entitled to reject Lord Cullen's recommendations, but when a Government establish an inquiry by a such a distinguished man and experienced judge, it is essential, if the supporters of that Government are to be carried with consent, that the arguments for rejecting the recommendations advanced by that judge are completely sound, completely logical and impossible to doubt.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary must address those points very carefully when he replies, and he must convince those of us who have doubts—at least among Conservative Members, and the hon. Member for Great Grimsby—that we are wrong.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I am having some interesting new experiences this evening. First, I agreed with every word of the speech by the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), and I applaud the manner in which he introduced amendment No. 1, which I am supporting tonight. Secondly, I almost supported a guillotine motion for the first time in my parliamentary career. I was saved from that by the fact that it was not pressed to a vote.

Although I can see the reason for time-saving this evening and support it, I am disappointed that the debate will not be extended because I believe that, as the debate is talked through, the fragility of the botched compromise at the heart of the Government's position is becoming increasingly clear.

I have sat through the debate. The kindest, friendliest thing that has been said about the Government's position is that it is a "weak compromise"—and those were the words of the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), who intends to support the Government in the Lobby tonight.

There are two inherent contradictions at the heart of what the Government have to say. The first has been mentioned tonight, and that is the question of the distinction that the Government are seeking to make between .22 calibre handguns and higher-calibre weapons. That distinction in terms of deadly force of weapons is unsustainable, and the Government must know it.

The headline in tonight's Glasgow *Evening Times* reads: ".22 Maniac Kills Four Children"—the case that was mentioned by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson). It reads:

"Today's shooting victims—a 16 year-old girl and her three brothers aged 10, 13 and 14 were found in their beds in Carolina."

The PA copy continues:

"A .22 caliber handgun was found at the home, WYFF-TV in Greenville Carolina reported."

On the very day that the Government are trying to sustain the difference in terms of deadly effect between .22 calibre handguns and higher-calibre handguns, we hear of an atrocity, the extent of which, even in a gun culture such as the United States of America, is unusual, committed by a .22 calibre weapon.

The Home Secretary is correct that a .22 weapon does not have the same force as a higher-calibre weapon, but it is accurate and deadly. The statistics prove it, and the evidence of cases such as today's tragedy in the United States proves it. The distinction is unsustainable, and the Home Secretary must know it.

The second troubling aspect of the Government's position is gun club storage. To me there are only two logical positions. Either one believes that a gun club can be totally secure, in which case any calibre of weapons could be used on gun club premises, or, like me, having seen the evidence presented to Lord Cullen—not least by the gun lobby—one believes that premises cannot be made secure, in which case no calibre of handgun should be used on those premises. It is one or the other. The Government are trying to have it both ways.

We see the differences between the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland. On the day that the Cullen report was released, we had a private meeting—I thank the Home Secretary for that, as I did at the time—in which the differences between those two Ministers were exposed. The Secretary of State for Scotland told us that, effectively, the measure would mean the end of gun clubs—that very few, if any, gun clubs could meet those strenuous conditions. A few seconds later, the Home Secretary said that new gun clubs could meet the conditions and come into existence. The Secretary of State for Scotland regards this legislation as a way to erase gun clubs and the Home Secretary openly says that new gun clubs meeting these stipulations could come into existence.

One cannot simultaneously argue for the eradication of gun clubs and the resuscitation of new gun clubs. The Government are trying to have it both ways in a botched compromise between the two lead Ministers supporting the legislation.

I believe that all right hon. and hon. Members are trying to do the right thing. They have thought about this issue for months. I claim no moral superiority over any other Members of the House; I believe that we are all trying to do the right thing.

Earlier, we were asked how we would respond if another tragedy were to take place. No one can give any guarantees, regardless of what we do; I accept that. We must all try to choose the least dangerous option. There are no guarantees. But let us suppose that the Government had their way, and afterwards an atrocity was committed using .22 weapons—either someone had taken them out of a gun club or someone had practised and gained expertise by using them in a gun club. In that context, how would hon. Members feel?

Some people on my side of the argument would argue, "We did our best," but even we would share in our collective responsibility as a legislature. We would feel that perhaps we had not done enough.

Looking at the record after Hungerford, I feel that I did not do enough to argue the case. I am sure that many other hon. Members, if they are honest, will share that opinion. There are those who genuinely and in principle believe that a ban on handguns is not the way forward. They might be able to live with their consciences because we all have to live with our mistakes, even if other people die through our mistakes. But what about those hon. Members who believe that a handgun ban is the right way forward, but will be dragooned, encouraged or helped into the Lobby by the imposition of a three-line Whip? If an atrocity were to happen, how could those people carry that burden? I do not think that they could. It underlines the argument why this issue, of all issues, should be openly one of conscience.

I want to say something about the position of Northern Ireland Members. I do not think that any two societies could have a closer relationship than Scotland and Northern Ireland—they are the "blood of our blood and the bone of our bone". I am certain that it is the settled position in Scotland that there should be a handgun ban. That settled position has come about not just from the emotion after Dunblane; it has hardened in the arguments over time.

We hope that Northern Ireland Members will find it in their hearts and consciences to vote with us. We would understand if, because this is not Northern Ireland legislation, they felt that it was not their place to intervene. However, feeling as we do in Scotland, we would take it ill if they were to vote against us, given the close relationship between our two societies.

I want to make a final plea for a free vote. I understand that, at a private meeting with the Dunblane relatives last Thursday, the Prime Minister gave the impression that if he were to change his mind and allow a free vote there would be political embarrassment. I can assure the Prime Minister that we—and, I am sure, the Labour Front Bench—would not take advantage of any such change of mind. I accept that there would be a momentary political embarrassment for a Prime Minister and a Home Secretary who changed their minds on such an issue at such a time. However, that momentary embarrassment would be as nothing compared with the real political damage that will be done if the Government win the vote but people believe that they have won it unfairly.

The right hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) said that he had the great privilege of meeting the Dunblane parents, the Snowdrop petitioners and others during the past few weeks. I endorse his remarks. It has been a privilege for myself and other hon. Members to meet people of such calibre. They are decent people putting their arguments not with hype or emotion, but with enormous authority. Of course, we should not automatically do what they say because they have suffered a huge personal tragedy, no matter how much we feel for them, but their arguments do come with authority and clarity.

One of the Dunblane parents said something on television last Thursday that struck me and which I hope will strike other hon. Members. Les Morton said that if there was a free vote in this place, the relatives and the other campaigners would feel that they had placed their case before us and would accept a judgment made in good conscience—but what they would find impossible to accept would be the knowledge that there was a majority in this House in favour of a handgun ban, but that that majority view could not be expressed because of the imposition of a three-line Whip and the strictures of the Government.

I suggest to the Home Secretary that that is real political damage. If the Government win the vote tonight through the use of what will be seen as a disreputable and unfair tactic, this issue will haunt the Conservative party up to and through the general election campaign.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I am grateful to be called, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Because the speeches of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) were extremely comprehensive, I can be brief. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West for tabling the amendment.

I am also grateful to be called directly after the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), who referred to the absence of a free vote. It is one of the most disturbing features of this debate. Perhaps I could be justifiably accused of being naive, but I remain very surprised that, having had time to reconsider, the Government's final decision is not for a free vote. I am sure that no one in the House would criticise the Government for a change of mind, which would be hugely and universally welcomed in this House, in the other place—which has been closely observing our debates—and in the whole country.

8.15 pm

Parliament is going through one of the periods in history when the esteem in which it is held is very low; when the public are increasingly mystified, frustrated and turned off by the antics at Question Time, especially Prime Minister's questions, with the massive trading of insults that masquerades as constructive party politics; and when all the parts of the syndrome of this place are going through a very bad patch indeed.

Yet, on the most primordial subject of all, the future safety of our national population, and in trying, in the limited way open to us, to make amends—it is the correct phrase when referring to the Dunblane tragedy—as we cannot make amends intrinsically for that dreadful, unspeakable, horrendous tragedy, we are not doing those things that we should do as a combined, united Parliament. I am sure that there would be an enormous majority in favour of doing them were it not for pressure from the Conservative Whips—and so we, as a House of Commons, are failing in our central duty. That is a solemn mistake, and I very much regret that the Government are making it.

The Government may be making this mistake for reasons that I can guess and understand. It is an automatic, characteristic response of our close and disciplined party system that matters must be tightly whipped. I guess that it was a hard-discussed, hard-fought Cabinet decision, with the bold prospect of going beyond some of the excellent recommendations in the Cullen report. I am not enthusiastic about some of the other recommendations in the report, but I will not go into detail on that now. I guess that, after that fierce and prolonged Cabinet discussion, the Secretary of State for Scotland took the Cabinet beyond the Cullen suggestions.

I applaud and congratulate the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland, other Ministers, members of the Cabinet and members of the Government, as well as the team in the Home Office, on what they have achieved and recommended. I hope that my colleagues in the Government do not misunderstand my remarks. They come from sadness and a certain amount of naivety, rather than a wilful hostility to what is being proposed. Anyone who said that this is not one of the most agonising decisions made by this place, in a long time, on human and social policy would be very mistaken.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dykes: I will, but I am watching the clock so that others may speak.

Mr. Allason: If this is such an agonising decision, has my hon. Friend any evidence to support his apparent belief that hon. Members on either or both sides of the House are being bullied into voting against their consciences?

Mr. Dykes: I wish that I had not given way, as valuable minutes have been wasted. However, I must allow my hon. Friend the right to intervene. He misunderstands what I have been saying. I pay tribute to the Whips in this case for having left us alone. It is the totality of the effort coming from this place that really matters.

[Mr. Dykes]

As I said during the statement on the Government's response to Cullen, it is a primordial matter of human survival and the future of human society. There is an urgent, overwhelming need for this Government, this House of Commons and this Parliament to turn back the incipient, menacing gun culture that is beginning to get a grip on our society. I pay tribute to the sincerity of the arguments of many of my distinguished hon. Friends, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Weston–super–Mare (Sir J. Wiggin). It is all very well when we receive deputations, delegations, letters and phone calls from extremely respectable members of the shooting fraternity—I would call them the shootocracy—but that is not the whole picture. There have been disturbing manifestations of what some of those other people are like, which have been mentioned in this debate.

There is not a fine line between very gentlemanly or gentlewomanly sporting clubs—in which very pristine, black and white targets are set up—and a United Kingdom in which the only manifestations of human behaviour are the national lottery, Nintendo and mugging. An alternative establishment is getting a grip on our society, some of which is related to underworld activity. I am sure that officials in the Home Office, the Metropolitan police and other organisations are closely watching those activities.

I think that I am entitled to be a constructive legislator on this issue because of a fear—I do not think that it is an irrational fear—that I developed before the Dunblane tragedy, although that is the provenance of this legislation. In 1980, I visited an open-air gun club in the hills of the Los Angeles forest, outside Los Angeles, where I saw the terrifying United States gun culture at work. Absolutely crazy people were members of it, and they were able to go into a shop in an ordinary way to buy a gun. We are a long way from that situation, but we know that people here are beginning to perceive that that establishment is getting a grip on our society. It is our job to turn it back.

One must therefore acknowledge that the Government are doing that which the House overwhelming welcomes. I supported the Bill with some constructive pleasure on Second Reading because the Government are going beyond Cullen. They are also reducing the legalistic and bureaucratic complexities of the Cullen recommendations. I recommend that course.

On 28 October 1996, the Gun Control Network sent a letter to hon. Members. I pay great tribute to the work done by the network, which was set up after the Dunblane tragedy, and all the people associated with it, particularly the component representing Dunblane parents and their friends and neighbours. Like other hon. Members, I can pay no finer tribute than to the way in which the parents have handled themselves since the tragedy by plunging in and producing some excellent suggestions. It would have been easy for them to switch off and say, "We want nothing to do with this now. The tragedy is so enormous and unspeakable that we disengage ourselves from it and leave it to other people."

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West for the way in which he has liaised with the Gun Control Network. The fact that two hon. Members from Harrow have tabled amendment No. 1 is entirely a coincidence—should anyone irrationally think that something peculiar is happening in Harrow or with Harrow gun clubs.

I sympathise with genuine, honest and decent shooters, particularly those of many years standing. It is very interesting, however, that the former military personnel with whom I have spoken are overwhelmingly in favour of a total ban. Elderly veterans who have been at the real, brutal front of the fighting in past wars are most fiercely in favour of a total ban. No proposals are perfect, and there will always be the dangers presented by exceptions. As we know, the Bill is not an attack on shotguns and rifles.

In its letter, the Gun Control Network stated:

"to allow .22 calibre weapons will inevitably offer shooters the prospect of further exceptions as time passes and the memory of Dunblane fades."

Is it possible for us to contemplate the memory of that dreadful day fading? It is awful to think that we live in such a violent world—with such violence on television and in arcades, where youths play violent video games—that violence becomes a routine part of our culture. I do not want to accept that that will happen.

The letter continues:

"The matter will be a constant source of conflict over technical and logistical detail. Manufacturers will be seeking fully to exploit the exceptions"—

which they are very quick to do. The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) mentioned in his speech the brochure on the convertibility of ordinary .22s.

The letter continues by stating that manufacturers

"may even design new models to bypass the ban. There will also be continual dispute over the transport of guns from club to club for competition purposes."

I thank the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), who is no longer in the Chamber, for not mentioning Europe in his speech—that was ingenious. His proposals for dismantling are immensely bureaucratic and complex, and they would be a nightmare to implement.

So the Government are going a great distance to please the overwhelming majority of hon. Members. But they are not going far enough if they do not offer a free vote—which would provide the combined authority of all hon. Members, so that people would have the true expression and know exactly where we stand.

With all due respect, I cannot agree with my 35 colleagues who, in their demarche, rebelled against the Government's proposals in the vote on the Bill's Second Reading. I cannot accept that pistol shooting is a conventional sport in the normal sense. I am sorry to sound like a spoil sport, but it is not a conventional sport as we understand the term, and I do not believe that it should be encouraged to be so. If people wish to switch to different types of firearms to get round the legislation, they can do so. Many people combine pistol shooting and rifle shooting, and no hon. Member is proposing a central attack on traditional rural shooting.

We have a solemn duty to perform today. Even at this late stage—although it may be too much to ask—the Government could relax their instructions so that we can obtain a stronger combined result. I think that this issue is the same as other matters of conscience, when there have been free votes on Government Bills. There are plenty of precedents for that, and I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend and his colleagues will think again about it on this extremely important occasion.

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): As the result of considered judgment over a considerable

period I support the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes). Like the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), I think that that is the settled view and position of the Scottish people, and I find it inconceivable that it is not also the settled view in the rest of the country.

I considered the Government's view that perhaps we should make exemptions for .22 weapons. Before giving that view undue consideration, however, I was immediately dissuaded by the gun lobby from accepting it. In my meetings with representatives of the lobby, they told me that, for various reasons, it would be inconsistent and illogical to retain such provision in the legislation, and that we should therefore not entertain retaining it.

Arguments have been made by those who wish to retain guns in our society. The arguments are spurious, and they muddy the water. The first argument is that crime is committed by using illegally held guns, and we have been told that only 4 per cent. of crimes are committed by legally held handguns. There is no evidence to support that contention. The 4 per cent. figure came from a small study conducted by an inspector in London, which was based only on recovered guns. The conclusions go no further. The opinion of the Select Committee that investigated the matter was that there are no reliable statistics. The Government have no statistics, and nor does the Home Office. We should therefore not accept the statistic.

The case that crime is committed by illegally held handguns is not relevant to the matter that we are now debating. We are not talking about criminals using guns in a threatening manner to achieve some other purpose, such as to rob a bank. We are talking about a possible mass murder by a person who uses a legally held handgun to murder many people. That is the issue, and the statistic on illegally held handguns is not necessarily relevant.

We have heard about vetting as a possible means of dealing with the issue, rather than banning all handguns. Vetting will be carried out by humans, and humans are fallible. It is not possible to close the loophole through vetting. Thomas Hamilton would never have been diagnosed as unfit and unsuitable to own a handgun or as having anything wrong with him on medical or other grounds. He would easily have passed all the established criteria. That option is not open to us.

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): Surely the evidence of Cullen is that Hamilton was severely criticised, certainly by one police officer who recommended that his firearms certificate should not be renewed.

8.30 pm

Mr. Galbraith: Most of the observations about Hamilton and his mental state were made after the event. Taking the event into account, one could make judgments about what was wrong; they could not be made before, and that was the problem in the Hamilton case.

Another argument that is often advanced and which I have heard frequently today is, "Why bother? There are no guarantees. We cannot legislate against evil. We cannot guarantee that this will never happen again." However, no one is asking us to legislate against evil; that would be foolish. No one is asking us to give guarantees; it is not possible to do so. All that we are being asked to do is reduce the possibility of such an event happening again. The only way to do that is to ban all handguns.

The decision that we have to make is where to draw the line. The hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) said that to take that argument to its logical conclusion means banning all rifles and handguns. Logic is an analytical process that deals in abstracts and can be taken to certain conclusions, but as human beings we make reasoned judgments that intervene in that logical process. Our reasoned judgments form various barriers—they might be physiological, physical or geographical—that we have to insert into the logical process. It is my reasoned judgment that we should ban all handguns and go further than the Secretary of State.

I say that for a number of reasons. What will happen if we continue to allow .22 handguns to be available? There are three possibilities. First, we could retain the status quo. That is unlikely, because we are undergoing such a seismic change. Secondly, the number of gun clubs could decrease as .22s are often used as a starting point—numbers would fall and we might get a de facto ban. If that is the hope, let us be honest and state that in the legislation. The third and most likely outcome, however, is that individuals will trade down and the number of .22s will increase. Members of the gun lobby tell me that the .22 is the assassin's weapon and that, if they wanted to kill someone, they would use one. If the number of .22s is to increase, we must ensure that we have a ban in place. It is our duty to consider that at this stage.

I conclude on an emotional note. I am not ashamed to say that emotion has a part to play. I have three young daughters aged seven, five and three, and when I look at pictures of primary 1 at Dunblane I see pictures of other folks' young daughters. I was present when the House debated the firearms legislation following the Hungerford massacre. We failed—I failed—because we did not take the interest in it that we should have. We saw what we regarded as an internal dispute between the gun lobby and what the Government were trying to do. We failed to push the matter further, and we cannot let that happen again. I do not wish to fail this time, and I therefore ask hon. Members to vote in favour of the amendment.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): So that no one is in any doubt, I should say that I shall vote for the Government's proposals, not because of the three-line Whip but because they strike the best balance in the circumstances. However, I am not claiming that I am completely happy, because I am very rarely entirely happy with the legislation we pass.

I put on record the fact that the parents of Dunblane and the people involved in the Snowdrop campaign who have been to the House and whom we met in Scotland have behaved with admirable restraint in the circumstances. While I was talking to them, I wondered whether I would be as balanced and restrained as they were if the same had happened to my children.

Earlier this evening we heard comments about people dressing and the type of targets used. It made me think that my generation never dressed up, and I wondered why. Then I realised—it was because we did not need to. After all, what with the second world war, Palestine, Korea, Malaya, Cyprus, Aden and Kenya millions of guns were available to national service men and, of course, the men were dressed up anyway. I thought that that may have been part of the reason—the fact that my generation dressed up for real.

[Mr. Bill Walker]

Then I thought again. I thought about my interests. My family have horses and would never dream of riding without being properly dressed up and equipped. My own interests are flying and gliding. Everyone I know who flies and glides—even those who fly the most modern light aircraft—seems to get dressed up in keeping with the activity being pursued. The modern fashion seems to be to get dressed up anyway.

When I was a young lad, I was a tennis player—I was not very good, only moderate—and I always thought that people who got dressed up and looked like tennis players could not play at all. Perhaps one should see the current fashion for dressing up in that light.

The worry that we are debating involves mainly illegally held guns and the fact that more people die because of such guns than was the case 20 or 30 years ago. I remind hon. Members of the days when there were literally millions of weapons available when service men took them home.

I have been convinced for many years that one cannot legislate to eliminate evil. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) spoke about 22 deaths in one of the Carolinas. I have been reading this week about children who have been stabbed to death in this country. Has anyone else read about them? I was reminded that the skean-dhu, if improperly used, is a lethal weapon. I am concerned that it should continue to be worn in public and would be worried if people were saying that it should be banned because, in the hands of an evil individual, it could be a lethal weapon.

This debate is much more important than many others. We are trying to strike a balance. I do not want United Kingdom competitors to be disadvantaged in an Olympic sport, whether or not that sport is one in which I indulge. We regularly win world championships in gliding. I know that hideous accidents and ghastly deaths occur in that sport. Of course I realise that there are differences between weapons that can be used for legal purposes and others such as aeroplanes, cars and gliders, which can be just as lethal in the wrong hands.

Mr. O'Neill: Does not the hon. Gentleman realise that, under the restrictions that will be imposed by the legislation that he is supporting, individuals who compete at the highest levels consider that it would be most unlikely that they could retain the capabilities that they have? He is arguing for the worst of all worlds, in which competitors would have the right to shoot but would not be capable of reaching the levels that they were previously able to achieve. That would be the height of frustration for those individuals. It would be much simpler to do away with all .22s on that basis if the hon. Gentleman is arguing from the point of view of sportsmen.

Mr. Walker: Was the hon. Gentleman present when I started my speech? He could not have been listening to what I said, or perhaps he did not hear what I said. Let me make my position clear. I said that I was not completely happy with the Bill. I would have settled for Lord Cullen's proposals. I do not believe that one should automatically ban all guns just because a judgment has been made that other guns should be removed and banned. I am trying to make a case—

Mr. O'Neill *rose—*

Mr. Walker: Will the hon. Gentleman just listen?

I believe that banning should be the last resort for almost any activity. One has to live in a society of balance, in which individuals pursue the activities that they wish to pursue, provided society accepts those activities on balance.

Hon. Members have talked about the balance of opinion in Scotland. Views in my constituency are very divided and I am sure that the situation is the same in every other constituency. Opinion is not united. In fact, the balance of letters that I have received runs at about eight to one against a total ban. I understand that many of those who have written have been motivated by a feeling that they will be disadvantaged. I accept that that is a good reason for people to write. Equally, I accept that those who are not motivated may not write.

I do not understand how anyone can make the claims that we have heard about views in Scotland. I do not make such claims about my constituency, where views are very divided. I think that my constituency is probably typical of large rural constituencies.

We have to consider the lessons of Lord Cullen's report. I believe that his proposals would have been less expensive. Hon. Members will not be surprised to learn that that appeals to me. I have always felt that we should watch public expenditure carefully. My personal view is that the compensation package will grow and grow.

I would prefer to give careful consideration to the failure of the weeding-out system. Everyone knows that Hamilton should have been found out. When the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) reads his speech, I think that he will regret some of his comments. I remind him that Lord Cullen recognised that some categories of people should not hold weapons. The letter that the hon. Member for Hamilton read out was a threatening letter. Anyone who writes threatening letters should not have a gun licence: it is as simple as that. If we approach the situation logically—as I hope we shall—we must conclude that that letter is evidence of why that man should not have his gun licence renewed. I think that the gun fraternity would agree.

I gather that my right hon. and learned Friend wants to speak. I shall therefore do what no other pressures have persuaded me to do and comply with the Government's wish for me to sit down.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I support the amendment. I am completely unapologetic about saying that my overwhelming reason for supporting a total ban on handguns is emotional. I am not ashamed of that. Emotion is a valuable human asset that differentiates us from lower species. Logic also dictates that it is rational to support a total ban. The simple truth is that the events of Hungerford and Dunblane would not have happened if a total ban had been in place.

As a parent and grandparent, I have tried many times to imagine the pain and anguish felt by the parents of the slaughtered children of Dunblane. I have failed, because

even in my worst nightmares it is not possible for me to contemplate the pain that they must have gone through and must still be going through. I can say only that I felt any sympathy of mine to be inadequate. However, I can add my voice and my vote to support their aims. I can choose between a person's right to pursue a sport and a child's life. As the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) said in his eloquent speech, how will we all feel if it happens again? I do not think that I could live with it if I did not vote for a complete ban tonight.

8.45 pm

To be honest, I have never liked guns or any culture that supports them. I do not like anything that promotes guns. I believe that the growth in the popularity of gun clubs has supported that culture. I have never bought guns for my children or my grandchildren and shooting is the last sport that I would watch at any level. I associate guns with killing people.

Mr. Winnick: If we have any feeling of guilt—my hon. Friend should have no individual feelings of guilt—should it not be a collective guilt among all of us who were here in 1987? It was primarily the Government who did not act, but we did not put sufficient pressure on them after the massacre at Hungerford. That is all the more reason why so many of us are determined not to repeat the same weakness and the same mistake now.

Mrs. Mahon: I believe that nothing other than a total ban on handguns will move us away from the gun culture. It is a small step, and we have a long way to go.

The measure is no reflection on the integrity of the majority of people who engage in this so-called sport. Of course the majority of them have nothing to do with the likes of Thomas Hamilton, but they would not be deprived of anything much if we diverted the country from the gun culture. That in itself is sufficient reason to support a ban. A different kind of society would be an incredible prize to pass on to the next generation.

The majority of my constituents want a total ban. Together with a Labour councillor from Calder Valley, Councillor McCafferty, I have been collecting signatures for a petition since July. We have collected thousands of signatures from people who believe that there should be a total ban on handguns. I have had just a handful of letters putting the case for guns—that is the absolute truth.

I am asking hon. Members to look into their hearts and to look at the unbearable sadness reflected in the eyes of the Dunblane parents every time we see them on the television. I have not met them, but I have felt their sadness from the television screens. Hon. Members must ask themselves whether they have the right to refuse a total ban. Our feelings and sympathies are inadequate. Tonight we can bond in common humanity with those parents by supporting the ban and trying to ensure that such an event never happens again.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I am pleased to be able to follow the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon). While I believe her speech to have been entirely sincere, I profoundly disagree with her because I believe that legislation should be made on the basis of logic and sound judgment.

The amendments are about what should and should not be included in the Bill. I accept that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has a difficult and delicate balance to strike. However, I have one or two points for him to consider.

In logic, if one is to ban high-calibre pistols, one should also ban low-calibre .22 rimfire single-shot pistols. However, having fired many calibres of pistol in my life, I can tell my right hon. and learned Friend that there is all the difference in the world between a higher-calibre, centrefire pistol and a smaller-calibre, rimfire .22 pistol. The lethality and the accuracy of aim make all the difference in the world. If we intend to act in a reasonable way, we should allow some people who wish to enjoy a perfectly legitimate and safe sport to continue to use lower power and far less lethal pistols.

I am glad that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has chosen the balance that he has, but I want to return to what I said last Tuesday. Can my right hon. and learned Friend clarify for us how the Government are justified in going beyond Lord Cullen's recommendations? Here I centre on the amendments. If the Government believe that it is not practical for pistols to be dismantled, please will they tell my constituents and all gun-using folk why? All the expert advice I have received states that most pistols can be dismantled relatively easily. If they cannot be, we should legislate on the basis that they must be dismantled and make the gun manufacturers manufacture pistols that can be dismantled easily.

For years, all the advice on shotguns and firearms has been that one should separate the bits of the guns. That applies even to shotguns and firearms that are held legitimately in people's homes. The police ask owners what arrangements are being made to separate the bits of their guns—the bolt, the fore-end of the shotgun or whatever. The advice is to separate the bits so that, if a burglar steals part of the gun, it is useless. That is a completely practical and sensible way in which to deal with the matter.

I am wholly in favour of banning handguns from private homes. That would be a sensible measure, and it is outlined in the Bill. Cullen comes up with lots of recommendations on how to tighten security at gun clubs and checks on those who go to them. If a criminal broke into a gun club, he would not know what make and calibre of pistol were there. The idea of his being able to come up with replica bits is far-fetched. To ban handguns from private homes would be a sensible way forward, but if my right hon. and learned Friend and the Government feel that that is not a sensible way forward, they have an obligation to my constituents to spell out in clear language why.

As I made clear in my speech last week, if we intend to ban 160,000 weapons, the cost, even on an average of £300 each, will be £48 million. On an average of £500 each, the cost will be £80 million, not including compensation for associated equipment and everything else. Under the money resolution, we are now making provision for other compensation. I take that to mean that gunsmiths and others will be compensated for loss of trade.

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton–Brown]

Certain groups and gunsmiths who are well organised will be able to put in their claims with alacrity. I want to make sure that the individual who has one pistol that is banned will be adequately compensated. I believe that—

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton–Brown: I was just about to come to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). I believe that his remarks are entirely irrelevant. Who will do the valuation, on what basis will the valuation be done and how soon after the guns have been handed in will the compensation be paid?

Mr. Dalyell: I know nothing about the valuation of guns, but I suspect that the hon. Gentleman does. I am told that the value of some pistols is not £300, but £5,000 or £10,000.

Mr. Clifton–Brown: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has made that point; he is absolutely correct. Some of the very latest pistols, which are almost totally plastic, can have a value running into thousands of pounds. The keenest pistol shots have been rushing out to buy the latest pistols not because of a macho culture but simply because they are more accurate than the ordinary metal pistol. People have been rushing out to buy them to improve the accuracy of their sport.

We are making it illegal for individuals to hold a whole class of handguns. Sadly, that class of handguns will be legal in many countries of the European Union. Already, some of those weapons are finding their way to the European Union because of people's fear that they will not be adequately compensated. Although what is happening is perfectly legal at the moment, it would be perfectly illegal once the Bill has been enacted for those guns to come back into this country. However, mark my words, Dame Janet, it will happen. We are laying an impossible task on the Customs and Excise and the courts because it will not be possible to keep out all illegally held guns. That will represent an on-going expense and difficulty of which we must be aware if it legislates in that respect.

Mr. Howard: We have had a distinguished debate, marked by high-quality speeches on both sides of the Chamber. I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) that none of us should be embarrassed by emotion in approaching this topic. The emotions it has aroused have been deep and intense, and they have touched us all. None of us needs to make any apology for having opened up our minds and our hearts to those emotions, but at the end of the day, as was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox–Boyd) and by many other hon. Members, each of us has to come to a rational decision. We have to exercise our judgment; I entirely accept that, in the end, the attitude that one takes and where one draws the line are matters of judgment.

We have to exercise our judgment in a way that we can defend rationally. That is the consideration that has influenced the Government as they have sought to discharge this weighty responsibility. We have tried to put the protection of the public uppermost; that has been our first priority. However, it has always been my belief that, if it is possible to provide the public with the protection they need and deserve while allowing some limited legitimate shooting activity to continue, it is the Government's duty to take that course and to come to a conclusion that permits that result.

Amendments Nos. 1 and 2 would introduce a total ban. Amendments Nos. 15 and 16 would have a quite different effect, as was pointed out by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). The amendments themselves, as has been the case with every contribution to the debate, have exemplified the difference in approach and view expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber.

Before turning to the amendments that encompass a total ban, I shall deal with amendments Nos. 15 and 16 and explain the Government's position on the dismantling of weapons. There are a number of reasons why we believe that such an approach would not be viable.

First, we accept that there are many varieties of handgun that can readily be dismantled, but there are others for which it is a much more difficult operation. Lord Cullen records at paragraph 9.89 of his report that the British Shooting Sports Council drew his attention to the difficulties of dismantling and the evidence given to the Home Affairs Committee, including by the police. That assessment is confirmed by the advice that we received from the Forensic Science Service that, if certain classes of highly tuned competition pistols were dismantled regularly, their accuracy would be significantly damaged.

As the amendments exempt from the ban only guns that can readily be dismantled, they would have the effect of banning many low-calibre, highly specialised competition pistols. Therefore, they would have the unfortunate effect of preventing much of the British participation in international shooting competitions that would remain possible under the Bill.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: The Home Secretary is over-egging the pudding somewhat, as he has not given us the numbers, the proportion or the class of weapon that should be in that category.

9 pm

Mr. Howard: It is difficult to be precise about proportions and I make no apology for that. Paragraph 9.89 of the Cullen report shows some of the considerable difficulties that arise.

Our second reservation concerns security. As I explained on Second Reading, Lord Cullen envisaged that the frame of the gun—the main part with the trigger mechanism, the butt and the barrel—would remain in the possession of the owner and that the club secretary would keep the part that had been removed—typically, the slide of a semi-automatic or the cylinder of a revolver. That approach has the fundamental flaw that, to put it mildly, it would not be difficult for a gun owner to keep an illicit spare at home. That would enable him to reactivate the gun at any time. It is perfectly true that, in doing so, he would be breaking the law, but he would be unlikely to be discovered until it was too late. We cannot ignore that factor.

It is true that we are envisaging illegal behaviour, whereas the main thrust of the Bill is to deal with the problems that have arisen in respect of the legal use of handguns, but we cannot adopt such a rigid approach to that distinction that we can afford to ignore a risk simply because that risk would arise from illicit, illegal activity.

Mr. Mitchell: I argued that such behaviour could be controlled by the licensing system. Even if the Home Secretary does not accept that, there is no need to do it in the way that Lord Cullen suggested. The heavier, more important part of the gun could be kept at the club and the cylinder or slide taken home. That would be much more sensible.

Mr. Howard: That was not the option recommended by Lord Cullen, who no doubt had a reason for making his recommendation. However, I do not believe for a moment that the variant on that option that the hon. Gentleman now advances would avoid the difficulty that I have identified. The hon. Gentleman has to face up to it, as we have sought to do, and that is the reason for our approach to Lord Cullen's proposals.

The essence of amendments Nos. 15 and 16 is to permit high-calibre handguns to be exempted from the ban. Many hon. Members have argued that, if gun clubs can be made safe for .22 guns, they can be made safe for higher-calibre weapons. The question of calibre is important and I should like to spend a few moments on it so that the Government's position is fully understood.

As Lord Cullen pointed out, high-calibre handguns are not target guns in the true and original sense. They have been developed from military and police models. Most of the competitions in which they are used are quite different from those of traditional target shooting: they are based around quasi-military and police scenarios, often using targets representing human figures. The power of the gun and the ammunition used are essential features of many of those competitions.

The huge growth in such shooting in recent years—to which Lord Cullen referred in paragraph 9.44 of his report—

"has led to the growth of combat shooting. It has led some shooters to don the trappings of combat, such as holsters and camouflage clothing. It has caused others to feel uneasy about what appears to be the use of guns as symbols of personal power."

Contrary to the implication posed by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), Lord Cullen was not talking about .22 calibre pistols in that passage of his report. He was talking about the higher-calibre handguns, which the Government propose to ban. We share the unease described by Lord Cullen at that point in his report.

Mr. Mellor: It is obvious that, if someone is looking for a symbol of power, he will go for the biggest gun on the market. What basis, apart from mere surmise, does my right hon. and learned Friend have for saying that people will not, in the context of an arrangement where only .22 pistols are available, transfer their affections to such things?

Mr. Howard: One has to look at the stringent security arrangements that we intend to put in place. I think that that is the answer to my right hon. and learned Friend's question. One is able to distinguish—not solely for the reason that I have just been explaining, because as I said, there are other reasons too, to which I am about to come. The reason that I have given is one—but not the only—basis for a distinction, which the Government think it is important to maintain and which is at the heart of our approach.

Mr. George Robertson *rose—*

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Mr. Howard: The hon. Member for Hamilton was wanting to get to his feet first, so I shall give way to him.

Mr. Robertson: The style, the shape and indeed the function of .22 semi-automatics—many people in the country and, I believe, in the House of Commons do not know that the Bill will legitimise semi-automatic .22 weapons—can be easily replicated for those who will be denied the larger-calibre guns. Has the Home Secretary's Department conducted any research since the announcement of the partial ban into what sort of trading is done? I was told by an eminent criminologist to whom I spoke this evening that the grey market trading of larger-calibre guns for .22 guns is already increasing at an alarming rate. The culture that Lord Cullen described in relation to higher-calibre guns is easily transferable to the new .22 weapons, which are featured in the publication that I showed the Home Secretary earlier.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman has made a completely unsupported assertion. Lord Cullen identified clearly in his report the trappings associated with the use of high-calibre weapons. The hon. Gentleman may make assertions about what might happen if some of those people—there may well be some—who use higher-calibre weapons wish to transfer to .22 weapons. My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North–West (Mr. Richards) read out was a very moving letter from a disabled constituent of his, who described the part that legitimate shooting plays in his life. I very much hope that my hon. Friend's constituent will transfer to .22 calibre shooting if that is not the kind of shooting in which he engages at present—it was not clear from his letter—so that, as a disabled person who derives legitimate satisfaction from that activity, he is able to continue to engage in that legitimate activity. That is one of the reasons why the Government have approached this matter in the way we have.

Mr. Salmond: Can we be absolutely correct on this? The Home Secretary not only admitted that, under his proposals, it would be quite possible for people to take the compensation money and buy new .22 semi-automatic handguns, but seemed to suggest that, in some cases, he would welcome that process. Would he really welcome people taking compensation money to buy new handguns?

Mr. Howard: I am saying that it is perfectly possible that that will happen; if it does and people want to continue to participate in what, when the Bill becomes law, will be a perfectly legitimate activity, of course they should be perfectly entitled to do that. They will have to carry out that activity under strict and stringent secure arrangements, which will be set up under the provisions

[Mr. Howard]

in the Bill. Those arrangements will put that activity on a completely different footing from that on which it takes place at the moment.

Two other reasons support the distinction that we make. First, high-calibre guns are particularly attractive to criminals and their storage in gun clubs in large numbers, whether dismantled or in one piece, would make gun clubs more attractive targets for theft. The second reason relates to the far greater power that those weapons have. The table in paragraph 9.49 of Lord Cullen's report, confirmed and corroborated a few moments ago by my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton–Brown) from his personal experience, shows that a high-calibre handgun is four to six times more powerful than a .22 pistol. It uses a much larger bullet that travels with greater momentum and, unlike a .22 rimfire cartridge, the power of a high-calibre cartridge can be boosted by people who make up their ammunition at home, as do the majority of handgun shooters.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): We have all read paragraph 9.49, which indeed shows that the higher-calibre weapons are more powerful than lower-calibre .22 weapons, but is not the Home Secretary confusing the issue of power with whether the weapons are lethal? In paragraph 9.49, Lord Cullen says:

"It should not be supposed that .22 rimfire cannot be as lethal as other ammunition . . . The BSSC pointed out . . . .22 cartridges would be as lethal as 9 mm."

Is not the point that, although .22 weapons are less powerful than higher-calibre weapons, they are just as lethal as higher-calibre weapons?

Mr. Howard: They are not just as lethal, although of course they can kill. The difference in the power is a very important factor, and, for all those reasons, we believe that the distinction at the heart of the Bill is viable and tenable.

I now turn to amendments Nos. 1 and 2. As I said at the outset, the Government's first priority is public safety. We are committed to doing whatever is needed to give the public the greater protection that they need and deserve in the aftermath of the dreadful events at Dunblane. The question for Parliament is whether that protection can be provided while allowing some legitimate use of handguns to continue. If the answer is yes, as I believe it is, the Government have a duty to act accordingly.

There are several reasons why we take that view. First, if there were to be a complete ban, there is a real danger that target shooting would take place outside the law, completely unregulated and not subject to any supervision or security. That would lead to a lessening of the protection of the public and is not a state of affairs that we should lightly contemplate. That is a serious argument that cannot be dismissed.

To all those hon. Members who take a different view on the complete ban and who have said to those of us who do not share that view, "How could you look yourselves in the face if, on some future occasion, some other awful event were to take place?"—with the implicit assumption that such an event would be a consequence of our failure to impose a total ban in this legislation—I say, "How could they look themselves in the face if that dreadful event were the outcome of driving this activity beyond the bounds of the law?" That could happen, as was acknowledged by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw).

Mr. O'Neill *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I do not have time to give way.

One cannot avoid or shrink from that serious point.

Secondly, we should recognise that the shooting of .22 pistols has had an honourable place in Olympic competition since the early days of the modern Olympic games. It is a legitimate activity that is enjoyed by tens of thousands of law-abiding citizens. If we can allow it to continue and still give the public the extra protection that they deserve, we should do so.

We intend that .22 rimfire pistols should be used only under the most stringent conditions in licensed gun clubs. No one would be able to shoot with a .22 pistol until he had been judged fit to do so and had obtained a firearms certificate. The clubs in which the pistols would be kept would have to meet rigorous security criteria and satisfy the police that they were run by people of good character. No gun would be allowed to removed from a club, except on a police permit. When outside the club, the guns would normally have to be transported by a third party who was authorised by the police as suitable for the task.

9.15 pm

Some people have questioned whether pistol clubs can be made properly secure. The answer is that they can, but I accept that it will cost money and it will take time. I acknowledge that the Government's proposals will bear heavily on many decent law-abiding citizens who own handguns and use them for the purpose of sport, and I very much regret that. But our proposals will allow continued British participation in four of the five international target shooting disciplines run under the rules of the International Shooting Union, which include the Commonwealth games. British target shooters will be able to participate also in all the disciplines in the Olympic games that involve only .22 pistols.

Before we finally vote on this issue, let us all remember the clear and unambiguous judgment of Lord Cullen on this central question, which can be found in paragraph 9.113 of his report. The paragraph states:

"I do not consider that the banning of handguns for target shooting or the banning of shooting clubs would be justified."

As I said at the outset of my remarks, amendments Nos. 15 and 16 would increase the extent to which those who at present own and use handguns would be allowed to continue to do so. Amendments Nos. 1 and 2 would impose a complete ban. I believe that the right course is that set out in the Bill, which would provide this country with some of the toughest gun controls in the world. They would be likely to reduce the handguns held in this country by 80 per cent. but would allow some legitimate target shooting to continue. I urge the Committee to reject the amendment.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has made three assertions in replying to the debate. First, he asserted that the banning of all handguns would drive target shooting underground,

but I have not heard any police officer suggest that that would happen anywhere in the country. I have heard no one other than my right hon. and learned Friend suggest that that would happen. Secondly, my right hon. and learned Friend asserted that .22 guns were less effective. I say that that is an assertion, because it is not backed up in Lord Cullen's report or by the BSSC members who spoke for the shooters and were quoted in the Cullen report. Nor is it backed up by other arms experts quoted in the report.

Thirdly, my right hon. and learned Friend asserted that the gun culture will not transfer. He is right in saying that, in paragraph 9.44, Lord Cullen was talking about the larger handguns and people who use them for macho purposes or as a demonstration of power. But the Gun Control Network has evidence from four police authorities and from the Police Superintendents Association of England and Wales that this is precisely what is happening already. The people whom they describe as maverick handgunners, who are prone to the sort of behaviour about which Lord Cullen talks, are likely to transfer and are doing so already. I do not think that my right hon. and learned Friend has been able to knock down the points that I made in opening the debate.

I have evidence from my conversations with a number of Ministers and parliamentary private secretaries that, on a free vote tonight, they would vote for the banning of all handguns. How can the grieving parents of Dunblane leave the campaign here when they know that they would get their way on a free vote? One day, when the House is allowed a free vote on the matter, they will get their way.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 281, Noes 306.

Division No. 15] **[9.19 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joseph
Austin–Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Ms R *(Perth Kinross)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Dykes, Hugh
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'd)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Mellor, David
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken

Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Ainsworth and
Mr. Greg Pope.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Rev William
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Sir James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*

Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Michael Bates.

Question accordingly negatived.

Miss Widdecombe: I beg to move amendment No. 20, in clause 1, page 1, line 16, after 'pistol', insert ', a muzzle–loading gun'.

The Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following: Government amendments Nos. 21 to 23.

New clause 1—*Muzzle-loaders—*

'. The authority of the Secretary of State is not required by virtue of subsection (1)(aba) of section 5 of the 1968 Act for a person to have in his possession, or to purchase or acquire, or to sell or transfer, a firearm if he is authorised by a firearm certificate to have in his possession, or to purchase or acquire, a firearm and it is a firearm which can only be loaded from the muzzle end.'.

New clause 2—*Exemption of muzzle–loaders—*

'. The authority of the Secretary of State is not required by virtue of subsection (1) (aba) of section 5 of the 1968 Act for a person to have in his possession, or to purchase or acquire, or to sell or transfer, a firearm if he is authorised by a firearm certificate to have in his possession, or to purchase or acquire a firearm which is loaded at the muzzle end of each chamber or of the barrel and is designed to be used with black powder.'.

Miss Widdecombe *rose—*

The Chairman: Order. I ask hon. Members to leave quietly if they are going, or to sit quietly if they intend to listen.

Miss Widdecombe: The intention of the amendments is to ensure that muzzle-loading pistols are not caught by the general prohibition that we are proposing.

Sir Michael Spicer (South Worcestershire): Will my hon. Friend specify whether the terms of the amendment will include reproduction muzzle-loaders, because the date of manufacture seems less important than the type of weapon? A tremendous number of people are engaged in the sport of muzzle-loading gun competitions, and reproduction muzzle-loaders are just as important as originals to them.

Miss Widdecombe: I assure my hon. Friend that I shall give the definition of such weapons, including replicas, in due course.

As I said, the intention of the amendments is to ensure that muzzle-loading pistols are not caught by the general prohibition that we are proposing. I should explain to the Committee precisely what is meant by a muzzle-loader and why we believe that they can be safely excluded from the ban. The definition of a muzzle-loader is given in our amendment No. 23, which states it is any gun

"which is designed to be loaded at the muzzle end"—

that is the end from which the bullet is fired "with a loose charge" and a ball "or other missile".

Those guns are invariably either designs of guns that date from the 18th century or modern replicas of such guns. If they are genuinely old and are not fired they will be exempt anyway from all control by virtue of the general exemption for antiques, which is not changed by the Bill. If they are fired under the present law, they require a firearms certificate and our amendment would not change that.

The example of a muzzle-loader that will be familiar to most people is a flintlock. Like all muzzle-loaders, it is prepared for firing by pouring loose gunpowder into the barrel, tamping it down and then dropping down a lead ball, which is held in place by a wad. That process may take as long as half a minute or more, and even then it is quite uncertain as to whether the gun will fire first time. Those guns, either originals dating from the Napoleonic wars or earlier, or replicas, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for South Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer), are fired by enthusiasts, who may fire their guns at targets or use blanks when firing them in historical re-enactments.

Muzzle-loading weapons are not a danger to public safety. They take a long time to reload and they are hardly ever used in crime. We believe that they can safely be exempted from the general ban on handguns and from the requirement to keep them in clubs. People will still need a firearms certificate for those weapons, and the tighter regime for issuing firearms certificates, proposals for which are included in the Bill, such as requiring two referees, will apply to individuals who wish to hold a firearms certificate for muzzle-loading firearms.

I urge the Committee to support the amendment. I also urge my hon. Friends who have proposed new clauses 1 and 2 to withdraw them on the basis that our amendments achieve the same objective. Indeed, the new clauses would keep muzzle-loaders within the general prohibition.

Mr. Couchman: I should be grateful if my hon. Friend said something about the storage of muzzle-loaders. Will they be caught up in the exacting and onerous regulations that will apply to .22 pistols, for example?

Miss Widdecombe: No. As my hon. Friend knows, .22 pistols are to be confined to secure clubs; those rules will not apply to muzzle-loaders.

[Miss Widdecombe]

Although my hon. Friend's new clauses seek to achieve the same ends, in fact they would not exempt muzzle-loaders from the prohibition—the new clauses would keep them within it, but allow them to be held on certificate. I hope that we have managed to demonstrate that muzzle-loaders are not a menace to public safety and that their exemption may safely be proposed.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I should like to make some brief remarks. First, I am sorry that the wording of new clause 1 is not quite right, but I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for accepting the principle behind it.

I have one simple point. We had an impassioned debate on the issue of a general ban and a decision was made a few minutes ago. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the Committee will now concentrate on making the legislation workable and sensible. Amendment. No. 20 is certainly an important contribution to that objective. On the other hand, my hon. Friend the Minister will realise that there are two other points relating to the amendment that we shall discuss shortly and that must be faced up to in the same way.

The Government are anxious that guns should not be kept at home, but I hope that they realise that that objective could be secured by having the partial storage of weapons in clubs. That would save a great deal of unnecessary expenditure and would also remove a major security risk, which many of feel would arise if guns were to be stored in clubs.

The next issue to be addressed is a sensible timetable. Whatever Act of Parliament we pass, we want to ensure that the timetable is sensible and appropriate in the circumstances.

Finally, bearing in mind what the Government said about competitors, I hope that they realise that the present arrangements for notifying chief constables about the removal of guns for competition will be difficult to work out, especially in the case of individuals who engage in many competitions. In the Southend area, we have a splendid shot, Brent Smith, who has won two silver medals and a bronze medal at the Commonwealth games. He attends many competitive events and it seems rather ridiculous that he will have to go through the whole process of putting in an application to the police every time he wants to take part in a competition.

In the circumstances, I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for accepting the principle of new clause 1. That is a major step forward. I hope that, in the same way, she will consider my other points to make sure that the Bill is a sensible and workable piece of legislation that will achieve the Government's objective without causing unnecessary distress and inconvenience.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I add my gratitude to that my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). I accept that the Government draftsman is likely to draft a better amendment than we are, but it says something about the speed with which the Bill was prepared that anyone should have included muzzle-loaders in the first place.

The exemption will assist a large number of people who enjoy the hobby of muzzle-loader shooting. The weapons are extremely unlikely to be used in crime and many thousands of people use blanks for re-enactments. People are having the guns manufactured for their own entertainment.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister of State and am happy not to press my new clause.

9.45 pm

Mr. Couchman: I am delighted to hear from my hon. Friend the Minister of State that muzzle-loaders will be exempt from the bans promulgated in the Bill. It will be important to my constituents who, almost every Sunday, re-enact Napoleonic battles at Fort Amherst. There are several historic spots within the Medway towns, including Fort Amherst, Upnor castle, the historic dockyard and Rochester castle, where there are regular re-enactments.

The muzzle-loading guns have no potential for crime: they take a long time to load and most of the people who fire them use blanks and do not load the lead ball. Even if someone has a licence to own a muzzle-loader, they cannot buy ammunition for it. Muzzle-loaders are mostly used in public displays, for education and entertainment.

I welcome the exemption, particularly as it includes replicas of historic guns, which were already exempt under the antique guns rule. The people of the Medway towns do not lie awake at night worrying that they are going to be taken apart by the flintlock pistols, horse pistols or cannons of the Medway re-enactment societies. The Chatham and Gillingham Volunteer Artillery, the Chasseurs de Cevennes, the 42nd Highlanders and the First Foot Guards will be eternally grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister of State.

Mr. Dalyell: May we take it from the gist of the amendment that the Sealed Knot has nothing to worry about?

Miss Widdecombe: Yes.

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): Will my hon. Friend the Minister of State accept the gratitude of those who use muzzle-loading firearms for sport, usually under the general title of black powder shooting? Will she also accept my personal gratitude for showing evidence of the Government's willingness to be flexible when sound cases were put to them during their discussions on this difficult subject? Strong emotions have been aroused and it has not always been recognised that the Government have been willing to listen. They have the gratitude of those serious shooters who have benefited from the amendments.

Mr. Henderson: The hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) will be able to judge whether the Government have listened to hon. Members and others when we see the final report to the House after 28 November. The Opposition support the Government's amendments; we support the exemption of muzzle-loading guns, subject to the endorsement of the local consumer standards officers. The most likely danger from a muzzle-loading gun is that one might blow oneself up rather than anyone else. If the consumer standards officers are satisfied, I think that the Committee will be satisfied.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 21, in page 1, line 20, at end insert—

'(3A) In paragraph (ad) (smooth–bore revolver guns), for the words from "loaded" to the end there shall be substituted the words "a muzzle–loading gun".'

No. 22, in page 1, line 21, leave out second 'subsection' and insert 'subsections'.—*[Miss Widdecombe.]*

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I beg to move amendment No. 9, in page 1, line 22, after 'any', insert 'readily'.

Some .22 rifles have detachable butt-stocks—there is one very popular one—and they could be regarded as short weapons if measured when the stock is detached. It is apparently impossible to use them when the butt is detached except in a test rig, and by inserting the word "readily" we feel that we would obtain our point. I hope that the Government will be able to accept this modest amendment.

Miss Widdecombe: I am afraid that I must urge the Committee to resist the amendment. The effect of the amendment would be to clarify that butt-stocks should be disregarded in measuring length only if they are readily detachable. I regret that, after much thought, we have concluded that we cannot accept that definition. Adding a butt-stock to a handgun can change its essential characteristic and in some cases, in terms of aim, make it more closely resemble a rifle.

The amendment gives rise to the further problem of what is meant by "detachable". Is it intended that it should include only butt-stocks which can be removed without the use of tools? Should it also include those which require a screwdriver to remove? It is true that some butt-stocks can be easily detached while others require more effort, but the point remains that, if a butt-stock can be removed at all, it should be disregarded for the purposes of measuring the overall length of the weapon.

I regret that I must invite the Committee to reject the amendment.

Amendment negatived.

Amendment made: No. 23, in clause 1, page 1, line 24, at end insert—

' (9) Any reference in this section to a muzzle–loading gun is a reference to a gun which is designed to be loaded at the muzzle end of the barrel or chamber with a loose charge and a separate ball (or other missile).'.—*[Miss Widdecombe.]*

Question proposed, That the clause, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Brooke: I shall be brief. The harbinger of my concerns was contained in my intervention in the speech of my hon. Friend the Minister of State earlier. My remarks were addressed, through you, Mr. Morris, to my hon. Friend, because the Government have indicated that part of their support for the .22 concession is to allow our participation in the Olympic games to continue.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary answered my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) wholly properly, but he did not give a complete answer to the question whether the Home Secretary realised that people had to practise with their own pistols. He was asked whether he understood that, to compete at county or national level—one is necessary for the other—one needed to be able to train and practise with one's own pistol. He did not specifically answer that question, so I return to it.

Do the Government realise that, at the highest level—county level leading to national—about 80 per cent. of one's training and practice occurs away from the club where one may do one's shooting, generally in one's home, on what the professionals call the kinasthetic element of the preparation? That will involve, at the highest level, at least two evenings a week in one's home.

There are serious separate concerns about training weekends. At the highest level, one must attend a training weekend three weekends out of four. Those are not competitions allowed for in the Bill; they are a separate condition. Although I shall not press my hon. Friend for specific answers on those subjects tonight, I want to say that, in addition to the ones that I have mentioned, there are concerns about batch ammunition tested for one's own pistol, and about the movement of the pistol, especially travelling to international championships, which my hon. Friend will realise are a necessary qualification for the Olympics.

There are six international championships between Olympics, and one must attend every one. It necessarily becomes a matter of concern how one is going to transport one's pistol to them.

I shall write to my hon. Friend on these matters. All I ask for tonight is a stated recognition that a competitor at that level must practise and train with his own pistol, and that no other pistol would be any good for that purpose. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary did not answer the question when it was put to him earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, but it is important that everyone is clear that the Government realises that that is the case.

Mr. Dalyell: There have been frequent references to the costs of compensation during the past five hours, and I think that clause 1 stand part is the appropriate occasion to repeat that reference.

Although various assertions have been made, the Government have said little or nothing. I ask for the Minister's attention, as I want to ask her a direct question. The Home Office must have some idea, in round figures, what compensation will be involved. I refuse to believe that the Treasury has not asked some questions. The figures vary from my estimate of £1.2 billion to £500 million from some Conservative Members to between £25 million and £50 million. What are the rough estimates of the Home Office?

The question asked by the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) and repeated several times since is, who will do the valuing? Valuers can have vastly different ideas of what guns might fetch. Is it to be a market value or an antique value? In other areas, the discrepancies in valuations by the great auction houses are mind-boggling.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): I would declare an interest if that were appropriate, having worked as a fine arts auctioneer. I am sure that the Government would be only too happy to avail themselves of the services, for nothing, of such experts, so that a proper value can be put on the firearms. In any case, the Government could recoup some of the costs by auctioning

[Mr. Andrew Hargreaves]

some of the finer firearms, which otherwise would have to be destroyed, in those countries where there are no restrictions.

Mr. Dalyell: If the hon. Gentleman is right, it is enormously significant that valuers are prepared to give their services free. In my experience, valuers do not come cheap. If they are prepared to give their services free—*[Interruption.]* Some of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues are shaking their knowledgeable heads. I suspect that it is highly unlikely that valuers would volunteer their services free.

I want to put my question as succinctly as possible. What is Home Office thinking on the whole question of valuation? Are we talking about £1 billion-plus or £100 million-minus?

Mr. Allason: I am grateful for being able to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. During the last few hours, several assertions have been made that I want to correct. The first and most damaging is that Thomas Hamilton had legally held handguns. It is perfectly clear to anyone who has read Lord Cullen's report that he duped the police over 20 years—in respect not only of the firearms he held, but of the ammunition.

Lord Cullen is extremely critical of the way that the police supervised the issuing of firearms. Plenty of people—at least three—in Central Scotland police were perfectly aware of Hamilton's character, and they wrote reports showing that. Detective Sergeant Hughes analysed the man's personality as unstable and untrustworthy. The recommendation that he should not ever be granted a firearms certificate is there to be seen.

The real problem is that those reports did not get into the criminal intelligence file. We now know that the officer in 1995 who was responsible for issuing the last renewal was wholly unaware of the existence of those documents, which are absolutely damning.

My heart goes out to the Dunblane parents. It also goes out to the police officers who had to investigate Hamilton, who had very well-founded doubts about his stability and who wrote about those doubts—which were then completely overlooked by their more senior colleagues. I am not surprised that one senior officer resigned from that force. There should have been other resignations.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): My hon. Friend will have noticed that Mr. Hamilton's membership of a gun club has been mentioned several times. Does he agree that Hamilton's membership was exceedingly tenuous? He may, nominally, have been a member of the local gun club, but he never attended it or took part in any of its activities.

10 pm

Mr. Allason: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The police were consistently duped by Hamilton. He claimed to have participated in many competitions when he was challenged about the amount of ammunition that he was accumulating, but no checks were made. The fact is that he had not participated in any of the competitions.

Mr. O'Neill: I have spoken to some of the people who were members of the gun clubs to which Hamilton belonged, and one or two of them thought that he was the type of man who was sufficiently devious to be able to con most authorities. They would not claim to be either hostile or amicable to Hamilton, because they realised that he was a loner. They said that, because of his personality traits, he would be capable of misleading officers.

I have much sympathy for the police who were involved at all levels in the case. I spoke at length with senior members of Central Scotland police, and I was convinced that dealing with Hamilton was a dreadful job. In Committee, we must try to establish a better method of licensing, so that we can ensure that such a tragedy never again occurs. Hamilton was a most devious and effective quasi-litigant, and I shall put it no more strongly than that.

Mr. Allason: Although I accept the hon. Gentleman's point that Hamilton was devious, Detective Sergeant Hughes realised that fact, and his report was absolutely damning. Hamilton may have been able to dupe very many people, but he did not fool Detective Sergeant Hughes.

Revocation is one of the key issues and difficulties—I am not judging the police after the event, because this is precisely what Lord Cullen's report states—that is perpetually at the back of police officers' minds. It had to be assumed that, if an applicant appealed and obtained a judicial review, the weight of evidence would be in his favour. One of the conclusions to which anyone reading the Cullen report would come is that there could be a straightforward way in which to amend the law to clarify the issue of revoking a firearms certificate and to make the judge's role crystal clear—whether it is administrative or judicial.

There was confusion not only in English but in Scots law, and in the precedents. The situation was confusing, and I readily accept that the police felt that their hands were tied. They believed that, unless they had good, strong evidence that could be presented in court—the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) is right—a devious man such as Hamilton had everything going for him.

My fear is that by, rejecting Lord Cullen's report—that is what the Government have done by rejecting its recommendations and going much further—we shall have disadvantaged many people who have been wholly legitimate firearms holders. I greatly regret the slurs made against legitimate firearms holders, who have made legitimate applications to the police and who have been able to demonstrate that they are fit and proper people to own a firearm.

One constituent has had a firearms certificate for 27 years. He is not a strange man dressing up in combat uniform or firing at human figures. He and many friends have participated in a legitimate sport for 27 years, and he had every expectation of being able to continue doing so for a further 27 years.

The House has persuaded the Government that there should be proper compensation for such an individual, but he pointed out to me that the ancillary equipment is sometimes more expensive than the weapon itself. I am glad that the Government have extended compensation to cover ancillary equipment. My constituent has £3,000-worth of loading equipment to make ammunition.

That is clearly a substantial investment, but what are we to say to the firearms dealer who has £9,000, £10,000 or £15,000-worth of security equipment in his house?

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Gentleman is drifting in and out of clause 1. There are many clauses on compensation and licensing. The hon. Gentleman must address his remarks exclusively to clause 1 stand part.

Mr. Allason: I am grateful, Mr. Morris, for your guidance, forbearance and patience. I did not wish to repeat what I said on Second Reading.

I think that the House made a terrible mistake shortly after the Hungerford incident. I urge the Committee not to allow clause 1 to stand part.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I have some sympathy with the remarks of the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason).

The right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) rightly said that one did not have to come from Dunblane to empathise with the parents of the tragic victims of Thomas Hamilton. As I said on another occasion, I was married in Dunblane cathedral, and I empathise with the people of Dunblane for that reason.

I have no doubt that public and press opinion, especially in Scotland, is very much in favour of the complete ban on handguns that was narrowly voted down a few moments ago. Yet, like the hon. Member for Torbay, I have a considerable sense of unease about the way in which we are legislating in haste in the wake of this tragedy. Let us be clear about this: we are denying a lawful sport to a significant but perhaps not substantial minority of our population. That is always a dangerous and difficult road to trail.

The right hon. and learned Member for Putney failed to answer one question put to him in an intervention: what would have happened if, instead of using a handgun, Thomas Hamilton had sawn off the barrels of a shotgun, cut down the butt, concealed it about his person, and then fired on the children? He could have caused just about the same damage. Would the House now solemnly be deciding to ban the possession of shotguns? That would be an unthinkable proposition for the management of the countryside. The passage of the Bill gives us something to be uneasy about.

I was amazed that so many people took up stances before they could possibly have read the Cullen report. I did not come to my conclusions until I had taken the trouble to study it carefully over the weekend after publication. I have also met representatives of the shooting club in my constituency. You have rightly pointed out that compensation is an issue for later, Sir Michael, but I should like to say in passing that, in the past year, the club has spent £40,000—including £8,000 of public money from the Sports Council—on a legitimate sport.

There is no way in which the club will qualify to be able to continue under the provisions of clause 1. There is no question of it being able to create the secure premises that the legislation will require. A club with 140 members, that has raised a lot of money for its attractive site north of Galashiels, is to go out of business.

I think also of the man in Peebles whom I have visited. He has a national—indeed, international—reputation as a repairer of all types of gun. His livelihood will cease. What about his children as Christmas approaches? That is what he asked me.

We should be strongly aware, as the Bill passes through this House and the other place, that we are taking away people's livelihoods and people's pastimes—activities that have been legitimate hitherto.

I voted for a complete ban, on the reasoning given by many pistol shooters in my constituency—it is not a universal view, but one expressed by many—that the Government scheme set out in clause 1 is expensive and unworkable. A total ban on handguns is a more honest and workable approach than trying to make a distinction between one type of handgun and another, which will leave the sport in such a situation that it will be possible only for the very rich to participate legally in future, I imagine.

Like the hon. Member for Torbay, my gut feeling is that the Government would have done better to rest on the Cullen report, and then by all means put other alternatives to the House on a free vote, as my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) argued. Hon. Members would then have had the opportunity that many wished for, to vote for a ban or some form of partial ban.

By the way in which the Bill has been divided in two, we are giving the public the impression that the important issue in the Cullen report was the banning of a certain type of handgun. It was not. The important parts of the report were about certification. Those issues have been sent upstairs to a Committee because they are not considered important enough for us to debate on the Floor of the House, but those issues are crucial.

To pick up on what the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) said, a careful reading of the Cullen report leaves me with no doubt that Thomas Hamilton should never have had a firearms certificate. Though the deputy chief constable who was ultimately responsible and who did not follow up Sergeant Hughes's report has honourably resigned, Lord Cullen makes the important point that, under the law as it stands in Scotland—I assume that the same is true in England—he could have won his certificate back on appeal even if his application had been refused.

We should be concentrating on aspects of the certification laws rather than on the mechanics of who owns a handgun. I do not want to stray out of order, but I am concerned that the Bill fails to improve even the laws on shotgun certification. As a Member of Parliament, I have great anxiety about signing shotgun certificates as though they were passport applications—they are treated in the same way. If we stuck more closely to Cullen's recommendations, we would not vote for the clause.

This is a difficult issue. I suppose that clause 1 will be passed. I do not know whether we are allowed to come back to it on Report, but I believe that the other place should have another careful look at it.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I had not intended to speak in this debate, but I listened carefully to the earlier debate and I did not vote in the Division. I want to explain my position. I felt unhappy because an option was put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Great

[Mr. Mike Gapes]

Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on which, unfortunately, as a result of our procedures, it was not possible to vote. In those circumstances—

The Chairman of Ways and Means: Order. It was perfectly possible to have a vote. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) chose not to move his amendment.

10.15 pm

Mr. Gapes: That is true, Mr. Morris. However, it was not my amendment.

The way in which the whole issue has been handled in the past few months is symptomatic of the way in which politics generally are dealt with. The mass media seize on an issue, which then becomes an issue of prominence to which politicians are expected to have instant solutions. They are expected to do something immediately to deal with the problem. The next week, the media seize on another issue and their attention switches somewhere else.

The media attention today—this is also true of the debate last week—is far less than it was during the frenzy over the summer. The same is true of so many different issues. One of the difficulties when we take decisions that will have implications for the future is that if the Government decide to have a three-line Whip and if, as has just been suggested by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), they do not then put forward the inquiry's recommendations as the basis on which amendments can be tabled and decided on by a free vote, they taint and distort the way in which the debate is conducted. That makes it difficult for those of us who might have had a slightly different position within any party to take an attitude that is slightly at variance. The way in which we structure the debates makes it difficult.

I hope that we shall vote against clause stand part. I shall do so if I get the opportunity because I have had discussions with members of gun clubs in my constituency. The secretary of one gun club has said to me exactly what other hon. Members have said: "I would rather have a total ban with proper compensation than the Government's proposals." He feels that the Government are proposing a device to save themselves money and that it is likely that many of the clubs will be driven out of existence. A man said to me this morning: "I pay £65 a year to belong to a club. Once we have all the insurance, all the paraphernalia and all the extra resources, the membership fees will go up, so ordinary people like me will not be able to practise our sport. Only very wealthy people will be able to continue." Parliament needs to think about those ordinary people. They feel aggrieved that, although they are law-abiding, decent people, they are being labelled as mass murderers.

Parliament has a duty when dealing with these matters to give people the decent compensation that they require for what they will have to give up. If the Bill is enacted as the Government wish, we should at least allow people to continue with their sport in a properly regulated way, without the stigma that many of them feel they have today.

Mr. Dalyell: My hon. Friend talks about decent compensation. Decent compensation is a huge sum that may approach £1 billion.

Mr. Gapes: If so, Parliament will vote for it. Perhaps we should have given more consideration to the proposals of my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby, which presumably would have required less compensation.

Earlier today I spoke to a man who feels bitterly aggrieved and worried that a minority of people who belong to gun clubs will feel that society has singled them out. I hope that will not produce unpleasant consequences. We shall have to be extremely careful to ensure that the legislation is monitored vigilantly so that those in possession of a legal weapon hand it in and that there is no underground conduit into the illegal arms market.

We also have to address the gun culture by restricting violence on television—even in cartoons—and the war toys that popularise the Rambo mentality. That has nothing to do with individuals who practise their sport in a decent way, but it has a great deal to do with the society that creates such people as Thomas Hamilton.

Mr. Leigh: Sadly, the vote that took place exactly an hour ago was a sham. It will be talked up by the popular press as a great historic vote, but it was nothing of the sort. It is in the interests of the Government to argue that we are preserving a sport and it is in the interests of the Opposition to argue that it is a disgraceful outcome that will result in 20,000 guns remaining in circulation. Neither is true. The 20,000 guns will have to be held under such strict supervision that most clubs—certainly all those in Lincolnshire—will have to close and people who wish to participate in the sport will have to travel at least 50 or 60 miles.

It is a back-door prohibition of what was previously a legitimate and popular sport. It would have been far more honest if we had accepted that in the first place. Therefore, I deeply regret that we proceeded in that way. However, there is a chance to make some amends.

I have just expressed a view that is popular among people in the shooting community, many of whom feel deeply aggrieved. I hope that in her reply my hon. Friend the Minister of State will reiterate that the Government do not intend to drive the sport out of business altogether and that, in framing the regulations, the Government will allow the maximum number of gun clubs to survive so that people who wish to pursue the sport with lower-calibre weapons can continue to do so.

Mr. Henderson: I do not wish to prolong the debate unnecessarily. We had a useful three-hour debate on the substance of clause 1 so I do not propose to reiterate any of the arguments or respond to any points that were raised.

Several hon. Members mentioned compensation. I know that you called them to order, Mr. Morris, and that you would call me to order if I were to dwell on it now, so I shall not do so. However, we shall discuss the issue in detail in Standing Committee and we may also return to it on Report, when it may be appropriate to address some of the points that have been raised tonight.

Sir David Steel: The hon. Gentleman is technically correct, but all the parts of the Bill that deal with

compensation are to be discussed in Standing Committee. He may have the advantage of being a member of that Committee, but I do not.

Mr. Henderson: That is true, but the right hon. Gentleman will have the opportunity to comment on Report, and, if not then, perhaps on Third Reading.

Mr. Dalyell: If my hon. Friend is a member of the Government after May—indeed, this applies to whoever is in power—it will be rather more than a matter of detail to discover that, with all the pressures for extra spending on education, on the health service and on training, there is apparently a commitment to pay a huge sum in compensation. That is why I am nagging for the fifth time this evening about the general nature of the compensation. I do not think that the figure of £1 billion would be very far out if it is to be decent compensation.

Mr. Henderson: I had recognised a Linlithgow nag before my hon. Friend's most recent intervention. I know that he will press the Committee on that matter; we will have to deal with it Committee. As far as I am aware, the Government are not yet able to say what the sums will be, and I understand why that is so. There has to be a wide discussion on what has to be included in any compensation claims, and until the principles are established it would be very difficult to put a figure on the amount.

If the Committee divides after this debate, Opposition Front Benchers will support clause 1, as amended. Clause 1 does not have the content that we would have wished and for many reasons, some of which have been mentioned in the debate, the Government's position has many contradictions that will be exposed. Indeed, the shooting lobby itself is saying that the Government's position is untenable. The Opposition's position was that the clean-cut way to deal with the matter was to ban all hand pistols except for the agreed exemptions for those used in slaughterhouses, for vets and so on.

I believe that, overwhelmingly, the public want a total ban. Parliament is here not only to look at issues logically and objectively but—we hope—to recognise the strength of feeling in the country. I am in no doubt that people in Britain want fewer guns, so that the likelihood of them falling into the hands of maniacs or others is reduced. People in Britain believe that, in most circumstances, pistols should be banned. Having said that, there will be an expectation that we should proceed with the Bill in order to have further discussion. For that reason, Opposition Front Benchers will support what remains of clause 1.

Miss Widdecombe: Once again, the Committee would probably welcome some brevity. I should, however, like to address one or two of the specific points that have been made, especially those made by my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), which concerned the need of people to train and practise.

My right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South asked me to give an assurance that I recognised that people engaging in competitions needed to train and practise. Our provisions are very clear. There will be a complete ban on handguns of a higher calibre than .22 rimfire. People who wish to continue to use those higher-calibre guns in competitions will not be able to do so in this country under the Bill's provisions. Those who are, for example, practising for the Olympics and four of the five Commonwealth games events for which .22 guns are used will be able to do so. My right hon. Friend is quite right that such people compete best—indeed, at the highest level it is essential—with their own weapons. That is why there is provision in the Bill for the movement of weapons from clubs for certain recognised purposes, which will of course include competition. We envisage that that movement would be effected by third parties.

I am sure that further consideration will be given to the points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South, but I wanted to address one or two of them because I am aware that he tried, without success, to speak in previous debates.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: On the question of transport and third parties, I understand that it is envisaged that the third party will collect the pistols from point A to carry them to point B. We will have a ludicrous situation because a vehicle containing 50 or 60 such items will be more vulnerable than if licensed shooters were allowed to look after their own pistols.

10.30 pm

Miss Widdecombe: I understand that point and that is the sort of detail that will be discussed in Committee.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: It is important.

Miss Widdecombe: Yes, it is an important detail. There is much detail in the Bill, to which due attention will be paid during its various stages.

I greatly admire the persistence of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). He should not have thought for one moment that I was not paying him attention, because I was faithfully writing down every question he asked. It is impossible to put a figure on compensation at present, for the simple reason that the figure that is estimated as being likely to be paid will depend on what we will compensate for. The position that we have taken is that we must compensate for any gun that is banned, whether it be held legally by an individual or by gun dealers as part of stocks.

We will have to compensate at the market value on the day before the Home Secretary's statement. It is clear that if guns are part of collections, as I have said previously, that will have some effect on the market value of the individual guns concerned. To get to the horrendous figures that the hon. Gentleman quoted, one would have to do a lot more than compensate for banned guns, and that is where the problem arises. When people say that we must compensate for all loss, not just for the guns but for all associated accessories—whether interchangeable with other guns or not—and loss of business, then the figures for compensation are larger. When the precise proposals are put in Committee, it will be possible to give figures, although they will not be precise because this is not an exact science.

Mr. Dalyell: I thank the Minister for the courtesy and, indeed, candour of her answer, but I must ask why the Government will pay compensation for stocks. If the

[Mr. Dalyell]

stocks of every gun dealer in the country will be the subject of compensation, we will be into astronomical figures.

Miss Widdecombe: No, the hon. Gentleman misunderstands. We are talking only about only banned guns. We are not talking about stocks of guns that gun dealers may hold in which it will still be legal to trade. Compensation will be paid specifically for banned guns, and we made that clear earlier. There is nothing unusual about my candour, as the hon. Gentleman called it.

I turn now to the speech of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), who again said tonight that we were legislating in haste. During earlier stages of the Bill, I tried to repel suggestion after suggestion from other Opposition Members that we had been too slow. We had to give careful consideration to the measures so that we introduced balanced and coherent legislation. The right hon. Gentleman asked what would have happened had the weapon used been a sawn-off shotgun. Sawn-off shotguns are already illegal. He also made his own case when he pointed out that shotguns have a use, outside sport and leisure, for control in the countryside. That is why handguns that have direct uses—those used by vets, for example—have been exempted from our provisions in the same spirit.

You have been very patient, Mr. Morris, and I am aware that I too have probably trespassed on issues that I should not have commented on directly, but they have been raised in the debate.

Mr. Leigh: Before my hon. Friend finishes, will she deal briefly with my important point about the shooting community? Central Government, local government and the police authorities will have considerable latitude in how they implement the new regulations on the safety of gun clubs. Will she make it clear on behalf of the Government that their view is that the new law should be implemented in such a way that the maximum number of clubs are kept open so that people can pursue the sport of .22 calibre shooting?

Miss Widdecombe: We will specify the conditions under which we require such guns to be kept and the security measures to be taken, and we will expect those to be enforced. We are not aiming to shut clubs or to keep clubs open. We are aiming to get the right conditions under which clubs may operate and to have them enforced. I support the clause, and I am grateful for the Opposition's support.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 1, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

To report progress and ask leave to sit again.—*[Mr. Coe]*

Committee report progress; to sit again tomorrow.

PETITION

University Funding

10.35 pm

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will know that the city of Newcastle upon Tyne is home to two universities and is one of the country's greatest university cities. I was handed this petition at a campus meeting at which the unions and staff representatives were discussing the result of their ballot for a day of action tomorrow. A remarkable young lady called Jenny Toomey, a science student at the university, spontaneously organised the petition with a group of friends.

The petition, from the students of the university of Newcastle upon Tyne, declares:

that the current level of funding to higher education institutions has led to larger class sizes, diminished tutorial provision, a reduction in practical work, and demotivation of staff. This has seriously compromised the quality of education and the standard of the university degree. In addition, the removal of student support through the loss of grant provision and entitlement to benefits has deterred many people from lower income families from undertaking courses in higher education. This is unjust, divisive and a waste of national resource. Britain cannot afford to ignore the long term consequences of under-investment in its education system.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to take account of the difficulties faced by students and by higher education institutions; to commit the Government to ensuring that British universities return to the high standards for which they were previously renowned; and to ensure that the funding councils are made open to public scrutiny, and that governing bodies of higher educational establishments be made accountable.

The petition then extends to the House the traditional and historic courtesies of citizens exerting their right to petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Fransware Nursing Home

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

10.38 pm

Sir David Mitchell (North–West Hampshire): I am grateful to the Under–Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), for being here to reply to my plea. The subject is the appeals procedure relating to the closure of the Fransware nursing home, and it focuses on the actions of Hampshire county council social services department and of the local government ombudsman, who could not bring himself to investigate the county council's actions.

The appeal concerns a Mrs. Francis—a much respected member of Andover's community, who ran a rest or nursing home and who, to her total astonishment and that of the local community who knew her, to the astonishment of the county council's local area social services team and to the astonishment and disbelief of residents in her home and their relatives, was arrested at 8.45 am one morning and taken to Andover police station on a complaint that she had ill-treated her residents. She was released at 12.50 pm.

Immediately after her release, she was informed that Hampshire county council social services department, at county level, was making an immediate application to the magistrates to have the home closed on the ground of Mrs. Francis's physical and mental cruelty to patients. With only one hour and 10 minutes, Mrs. Francis found a local solicitor and briefed him for a 2 pm hearing in the magistrates court. The magistrates heard the case and, rightly, threw it out.

I must turn the clock back three months to January 1992, when Mrs. Francis took in a Mr. and Mrs. Earl—that is not their name, but I want to protect their family. Mr. Earl was known as a difficult and, some might say, plain cantankerous, old man. After some weeks, Mrs. Francis found that he disrupted the home so badly, upsetting other residents, that she gave him a month's notice. It should be noted that Mr. Earl did not want to leave. Indeed, he became very angry and objected strongly. On the evening before his departure, he told Mrs. Francis, "I'll get you for this."

I recognise that any county social services department would be in a quandary if it received notification from the police or any other source that patients, for whom it had a responsibility as the licensing authority, were allegedly being ill-treated. There have been too many cases in other parts of the country in which failure to act has rightly been criticised. I can understand Hampshire county council considering whether to withdraw the licence, but for goodness' sake, before taking such a drastic step, why did the council not inquire about the home from those who were really in the know?

For example, why did the council not say to the proprietor, "These charges have been made. What is it all about?" Why did the council not ask the relatives who were always popping in and out to see patients, or even ask the local office, which would have told them,

"Whatever time of the day you went into Fransware, the atmosphere was always friendly and relaxed"?

This is a home where the local county social services department found

"relatives, social workers, district nurses and GPs were in and out all day long. If patients were ill treated surely someone would have noticed."

Having started on the road to closing the Fransware nursing home, however, there was no stopping the county council juggernaut. Aspects of the case would have made any reasonable person pause and think again. The relatives of nine out of the 10 residents wrote to condemn the county council's proposed action. The 10th resident had no relatives, but a local solicitor acted for her. On the closure of the home, he had so much confidence in Mrs. Francis that he asked her to look after his ward personally and privately.

I shall quote one of many similar letters. It was sent by Mrs. Byrne, who writes:

"My mother has been a resident in the home for about three years. She is senile, almost blind and totally incapable of looking after herself. My father lives in Andover and we both visit the home frequently. Never have we had cause to complain or in the slightest way to suspect that the treatment my mother is having is anything other than suitable, correct and caring. She is always clean and content and clearly well fed . . . We visited frequently, often when not expected and never found anything in the slightest untoward."

In spite of what one might have thought, the county council proceeded.

One of the charges was that Mrs. Francis had ill-treated one of the patients—a sprightly old lady, who was eager to give evidence that, far from treating her roughly as had been charged, Mrs. Francis had treated her "gently". The county might have paused when it noted that, following its own official inspections in 1989, 1990 and 1991, letters were sent to Mrs. Francis that were generally complimentary. The social services department took the matter to its social services sub-committee.

Mr. J. R. French, a well-respected local solicitor retained by Mrs. Francis, said:

"it is almost a foregone conclusion that the Council will succeed in its application before its own Social Services Sub-Committee . . . It is difficult to see what point there is in the Sub-Committee hearing unless the Council Director of Social Services is manifestly acting in bad faith (although in any event he will not be open to cross-examination)."

Interestingly, he continued:

"letters I have written to employees of the Department have been responded to by the Director, inviting me to make any contact with employees through him."

That sounds like an easy, unbiased way of getting information, does it not? He went on:

"The implication is that he would not consent to their involving themselves in Mrs. Francis' 'defence'."

The county sub-committee duly confirmed the case of the county social services. There are certain aspects worth noting. On 15 October 1992, the council made a decision against Mrs. Francis. I shall mention three of the grounds.

First, the council said:

"You have on occasions physically assaulted residents."

I can tell the House about that case. Mr. and Mrs. Earl were due to go to bed one evening, and the nurse who went to see them to bed came down to fetch Mrs. Francis, because a fight was in progress. Mrs. Francis went up and found that not only were the two having fisticuffs but Mrs. Earl was fouling her underwear. In that circumstance, Mrs. Francis had to do something physical to separate the contestants. It was alleged—I would not

[Sir David Mitchell]

be surprised at this—that she slapped Mrs. Earl to effect that separation. What the heck else she could have done, I do not know.

Secondly, Mrs. Francis was told:

"You have on occasions forced a resident to drink against her will."

She had been advised by the doctor that that resident should increase her consumption of liquids. Thirdly, she was told:

"You have subjected residents to a toileting routine that failed to give consideration to their needs, including their need for dignity, their wishes and feelings."

When incontinent old people do not go to the loo because they have dementia and cannot remember, what can one do other than have a routine to trot them through at the right time so that they are protected from wetting their underwear? Of course such things have to happen in the real world of people who are in advanced stages of old age and, in many cases, dementia.

Mrs. Francis appealed to the rest homes tribunal and the case was heard in March a year later. The first hearing took five days. The county council presented its case, and the witnesses were cross-examined by the council and by Mrs. Francis's solicitor. The five days did not give time for Mrs. Francis's case to be put at all. Accordingly, the tribunal adjourned until July. By then, Mrs. Francis was bust. The county had by its ill-considered actions destroyed her business, and negative equity in the premises polished it off.

The local government ombudsman wrote:

"Section 26(6)(a) of the Local Government Act 1974 prevents the Local Government Ombudsman from investigating any matter for which the person aggrieved has or had a right of appeal to a Tribunal, except if the Local Government Ombudsman is satisfied that it is not reasonable to expect the person to resort to it. In this case Mrs Francis resorted to her right of appeal to the Tribunal. I considered carefully your contention that Mrs Francis could not afford to complete the appeal and therefore it would be open me to investigate her complaint.

I am of the view that it would be wholly inappropriate to exercise discretion and pursue this case. That is because, even if I were to make enquiries, I would have no powers whatsoever to challenge the decision made by Hampshire County Council to de-register Mrs Francis. That power lies only with a Tribunal or the Courts. I therefore confirm that I see no grounds to change my predecessor's opinion that this complaint should not be pursued further."

That letter is from the local government ombudsman, over the signature of Mr. J. R. White, and dated April 1996. I appealed to the county council to give a fair hearing, but I did not get very far. The leader of the county council, Councillor Hancock, simply reasserted what had been said by the chief executive.

Finally, this August I had a letter from Mr. Stephen Adam of Hampshire county council that took broadly the same line as had Mr. Hancock. It stated:

"I appreciate your view that she"—

Mrs. Francis—

"had a full defence but could not afford to continue to be legally represented and thus had to withdraw; whilst we can never know whether this would have affected the ultimate outcome, the fact in law is that her withdrawal concluded the tribunal's proceedings and that by choosing"—

choosing is the word that was used; it made me choke—

"not to continue her appeal she had accepted that the case made against her had succeeded."

The poor woman has not had the opportunity to put one word of her case to the tribunal, because she ran out of funds as a result of the actions of the county council in bringing about her bankruptcy.

I raised the question of a reference so that Mrs. Francis could get other employment. The letter continued:

"In the event of any request being made to the Social Services Department for a reference . . . We would be bound to take the above circumstances into account."

In other words, having destroyed her business, Hampshire county council is pursuing its vendetta to the point of destroying her ability to earn a living by refusing her a reference.

A constituent of mine has had her business ruined by the county council's overreaction and has been brought to the door of bankruptcy. She is unable to put her case and has been told by the ombudsman and county council that she has had an opportunity to appeal when clearly she has not. Finally, she has been denied a reference for a job. I hope that the county council officials, the chief executive and leader of the county council and the ombudsman are thick-skinned enough to sleep easy in their beds. I have wrestled with the case for four and a half years and explored every avenue to get Mrs. Francis the opportunity to clear her name. I invite the Minister to consider the appeals procedure for those very good reasons.

10.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Simon Burns): I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond to my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir D. Mitchell) and congratulate him on securing a debate on a subject which is significant not only because of Mrs. Francis' important case but because of the whole question of the appeals procedures relating to the closure of Fransware nursing home. I recognise that it is an important issue. My hon. Friend has made clear his case that the Fransware rest home should not have been closed. It happened more than three years ago, and it would be wrong for me to try to go into the merits of the case brought against Mrs. Francis by Hampshire county council.

The Department of Health has no role in the quasi-judicial procedure prescribed in the Registered Homes Act 1984 except to the extent that it provides administrative support to the wholly independent registered homes tribunal. However, I agree that it is unfortunate that Mrs. Francis has not had an opportunity to present her side of the case and to defend her reputation and livelihood before the competent authorities. I understand her feelings about the way in which the procedures operated to produce this extremely unsatisfactory conclusion.

I hope that my hon. Friend will bear with me as I explain that the purpose of the Registered Homes Act 1984 and the enforcement mechanism that it provides is to ensure that people in residential care are safeguarded from harm. We cannot allow elderly, frail and often confused people to be given an inadequate level of care. The primary duty of the authorities that regulate homes is to protect vulnerable people. I suspect that no one would disagree with that. On the other hand, the home owner is also entitled to justice and fairness.

It might be helpful if I briefly explain the procedures to be followed if an authority wishes to deregister a home. The Registered Homes Act 1984 sets out a number of stages that seek to ensure that allegations of poor care are properly investigated and dealt with in accordance with the rules of justice. Home owners against whom such allegations are made can first make representations to members of the authority. If necessary, they can subsequently appeal to a registered homes tribunal and from there to the High Court on a point of law.

In this case the appeal to the tribunal was started but was subsequently stopped when Mrs. Francis withdrew the appeal before her side of the case was put. I shall explain later the circumstances behind that withdrawal.

I am told that, before the investigations made by the police in April 1992 into allegations of abuse of residents, the home had given the authorities no significant cause for concern. The local inspectors reported only relatively minor matters that did not affect the home's registration. Following their early investigation, the police reported their concerns to the authority, which correctly began its own investigations. As my hon. Friend has pointed out, the police subsequently dropped their case.

In this context, it is important to be clear that two related but different issues were being considered. The police would have been investigating possible crimes of assault, whereas the authority was investigating a civil matter as to whether the home could continue to be licensed. In each case the standard of proof is different. The police have to prove a matter beyond a reasonable doubt, while the authority needs to prove its case on a balance of probabilities.

At about the time of the police action the authority considered that there was sufficient evidence for it to apply to the magistrate for an emergency closure order. Such orders can be made under the 1984 Act in certain circumstances of serious risks to residents. As my hon. Friend rightly said, the magistrate threw out that application.

I understand that local media publicity about the action in the magistrates court brought forward a number of ex-members of staff and ex-residents of Fransware who wished to give evidence about care at the home. Clearly, it took time for the authority, Hampshire county council, to investigate those subsequent allegations and to put together its evidence. Thus, it took about three months from the authority's first proposal at the end of April 1992 to cancel the homes registration to complete those investigations in July 1992.

Mrs. Francis had said that she wished to exercise her legal right to represent her case orally to the authority. A hearing was fixed for August 1992, but I understand that it was delayed until October 1992 so that Mrs. Francis could be legally represented. The committee of the authority hearing those matters decided that the registration should be cancelled. Mrs. Francis then appealed to the wholly independent registered homes tribunal, which received notice of the appeal on 5 November 1992.

Following the agreement of the parties, the tribunal was fixed for 24 March 1993 and scheduled to sit for five days. In the event, I am told that those days were taken up entirely with hearing the evidence of the authority. I gather that that was partly because Mrs. Francis's counsel cross-examined the authority's witnesses in detail. Indeed, the whole of the authority's evidence had not been heard at the end of the sitting. The tribunal had to adjourn and offered the parties dates at the end of March 1993 and early April. Unfortunately, the dates did not suit the legal representatives of either Mrs. Francis or the county council . The hearing was finally scheduled to resume on 22 July 1993.

Before the hearing resumed, Mrs. Francis had to withdraw; I understand that that was for financial reasons. That left the tribunal with no alternative but to find for the authority and the home subsequently closed.

It is true that that meant that the residents of the home and their relatives were unable to lend Mrs. Francis their support in the appeals process. To my mind, that is very unfortunate, and as I said earlier, I can appreciate how Mrs. Francis must feel. The merits of the arguments on both sides have not been properly judged. Sadly, I have no powers to intervene and it is not for me to judge whether the home should have been closed or not. I do appreciate Mrs. Francis's sense of grievance that the issue was never finally determined, and her bitterness is, in my view, justifiable.

I can, however, tell the House that we are well aware that the enforcement mechanisms in this area are felt by authorities and homeowners alike to be remote, cumbersome and expensive. That was pointed out to Tom Burgner, who conducted our review of social services regulations and inspections. He recommended a new system of local mediation which might prevent some cases from having to reach the tribunal stage, involving as that does senior lawyers on both sides, the rigours of a judicial system and great expense. We are not sure that such mediation is the answer, but we agree that the enforcement mechanism needs to be examined to ensure that it operates expeditiously and fairly to resolve disputes in the interest of all concerned. In the coming few months, we will be looking at the rules of the tribunal and other parts of the appeals system to see how it might be made to function better.

In the White Paper, "Striking the Balance", on the future of legal aid in England and Wales, the Government said that although they had decided not extend legal aid generally to more tribunals, they would consider doing so where any particular tribunal would work more cost effectively if legal aid paid for representation. Such an extension would be dependent on the cost control measures proposed in the White Paper being in place. If it is clear that cases such as that of Mrs. Francis are the norm rather than the exception, I will certainly raise the matter of the extension of legal aid to representation at the tribunal with my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor, although sadly that will not help Mrs. Francis's case.

My hon. Friend also raised the possibility of the local government ombudsman investigating the actions of Hampshire county council in this case. I share my hon. Friend's concerns and was myself interested in the possible role of the ombudsman in determining Mrs. Francis' complaints. To that end, we have been in touch with the office of the ombudsman in the past day or so. I understand that its initial view is that, because Mrs. Francis has exercised her legal rights of appeal, there is nothing further that the ombudsman can do.

My hon. Friend may wish to pursue this matter further with the ombudsman to see whether the ombudsman will reconsider that opinion, in the light of all the facts and the

[Mr. Simon Burns]

unusual circumstances involved in this case and given that the tribunal never reached a decision. Obviously, I can in no way prejudge, pre-empt or seek to persuade the local government ombudsman, who is totally independent, on this issue. As I said, my hon. Friend may wish to pursue the matter, but there is no guarantee that the ombudsman will change his view.

In conclusion, I understand Mrs. Francis's frustration at the fact that the procedures were never able to reach a logical conclusion and a decision on the case between Mrs. Francis and Hampshire county council. It was through no fault of Mrs. Francis that the case ended as it did: she ran out of money so the tribunal was unable to conclude hearing the case and reaching a decision. As I have said, it is deeply frustrating and extremely unsatisfactory, and I have a great deal of sympathy for Mrs. Francis, who has suffered the cost, both financially and in terms of her personal well-being.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 19 November 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON BILL *[Lords]*

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Promoters of the King's College London Bill *[Lords]* may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with:

That if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session:

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read) and shall be ordered to be read the third time;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during any previous Session.—[*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Tuesday 26 November.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Urban Land (Development)

1. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the amount of new development taking place on derelict or underused urban land (a) currently and (b) in 1991. [3116]

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): In 1985, 38 per cent. of land for new housing came from land previously used for urban development. Since then, we have moved close to the Government's 50 per cent. target. I am now looking at whether that target could be higher.

Mr. Smith: That is very welcome news, but given the natural and understandable propensity of developers to develop on green-field sites and the obvious benefit to the green belt and the countryside of developing underused urban land, will my right hon. Friend continue to give this very useful programme a very high priority?

Mr. Gummer: Yes, certainly. I have committed myself to defending the green belt and believe that the present footprint is what ought to be developed first.

Mr. Betts: Is not the use to which underused and derelict land is put important and should it not be in line with Government guidance? Perhaps the Secretary of State is aware of the correspondence that I have had with the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency about a planning application for a 20-screen cinema complex in Broughton lane in my constituency. The application was bungled by the development corporation and there was a lack of decision by Ministers. As a result, an application for nine screens became one for 20 screens without any proper debate. As if that was not bad enough, by the time this business is finished, there will be more than 50 cinema screens in my constituency, which is far too many and clearly has a deleterious impact on Sheffield city centre. Does the Secretary of State accept that planning guidance should not be about warm words but about practical action? The development corporation's decision did not follow the guidance. The application will have a deleterious impact on the city centre and is not a proper use of the derelict land in question.

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not want me to comment on such a particular question. I am very pleased that Sheffield, with its development corporation, is now so attractive a place for people to invest in—which was not true when he was leading Sheffield city council.

Town Centre Managers

2. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many town centre managers are now in place; and how many there were five years ago. [3117]

The Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency (Mr. Robert B. Jones): There are now more than 180 town centre managers in the UK, compared with fewer than 20 in 1991.

Mr. Waterson: Is my hon. Friend aware that the post of town centre manager in Eastbourne was established in 1992 and that the present incumbent is Elliott Cairnes? The post forms a genuine partnership between the borough council and leading local retailers. It has had a broad measure of success in boosting the status of Eastbourne as a major regional shopping centre, as well as resisting the effects of out-of-town shopping development.

Mr. Jones: I am certainly happy to join my hon. Friend in saying what a good job is being done by all those involved in the Eastbourne town centre initiative. Eastbourne is a very attractive place and should be successful. It can be so only through partnerships of the nature described by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Vaz: May I congratulate the Minister on adopting the policies on town centre issues that the Opposition have espoused over the past 10 years. It is a welcome conversion to common sense. I remind him that Labour councils, with their partners in the private sector, have been the ones to work hard to develop so many new initiatives on town centre management—without any help from the Government, him or the Secretary of State. Can the Minister point to one new policy—just one—that, if implemented, will directly assist town centre management, or is he just going to repeat some more political plagiarism?

Mr. Jones: I noticed that the hon. Gentleman was hobbling when he came into the Chamber—that is the trouble with trying to keep one foot in each camp. The hon. Gentleman has been trying to tell the supermarket developers that the Labour party would relax our policy, and to tell consumers that it would protect them. He cannot have it both ways.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that too many town centres are being destroyed by unnecessary parking restrictions? Will he advise local authorities such as Barnet to get their finger out and do something about it?

Mr. Jones: Parking is a critical issue for reinforcing the attractiveness of town centres, and local authorities should look carefully at their policies to see whether they are putting people off coming to take advantage of the retail or leisure opportunities in their town centres.

Global Warming

3. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review his estimate of global warming for the next five years. [3118]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): We are working on the basis of an estimated global average temperature increase of between 0.1 and 0.2 deg C over the next decade.

Mr. Corbyn: Is the Minister aware that a number of reputable estimates suggest that, within the next five years the average increase in global temperature will be 0.5 deg C above the 1951 to 1981 average and that, over the past 50 years, carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has gone up from 300 to 360 parts per million? That suggests a substantial increase in global temperatures and, therefore, all the attendant problems of global warming. Given the conflicting evidence available to the Government, will the Minister, first, put more money into research into global warming, its causes and the likely crop effects and, secondly, do more to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from this country and do his best worldwide to ensure that the agreements reached in Rio and other places are adhered to, so that we do not go into the next century with a significantly higher temperature than is already predicted?

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman will know that the estimates to which I referred are supported by the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Hadley centre. It is important for us to work on the basis of the best scientific advice, which in this case is also accepted by other developed countries that have signed up to the climate change convention. As the hon. Gentleman may also know, since we signed up to that convention, we have gone a long way towards achieving our commitment, unlike many other countries.

Mrs. Gorman: Will my hon. Friend assure the House that among the authorities that he takes note of are organisations such as NASA, which points out that the influence of sun spots, with the influence of volcanic activity, have more effect on global warming but that we can do nothing about them? Does he also agree that the amount of attention we pay to CO_2 emissions, which have a deleterious effect on industry, is possibly out of all proportion to their importance?

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend makes some interesting points. She should be aware of the many serious implications that would follow global warming in the long term, including the effect it would have on particular regions and on sea level. It is important for us to address those implications, and we are. My hon. Friend should also be aware, as should the Labour party, that unlike many other developed economies, such as the United States, Japan, Australia, Canada and most of the European Union, this country is on course to comply with the targets it agreed in the climate change convention. We are now setting challenging targets for the future to protect our climate.

Mr. Dafis: Will the Minister accept that road traffic increase is bound to be one of the most significant contributors to greenhouse gas emissions? Does he agree that it needs urgent attention and that the Government could take the lead by setting targets within a strategy for road traffic reduction? Will the Government indicate whether they will support the Road Traffic (Reduction) Bill, which will shortly be introduced by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster)?

Mr. Clappison: Our policies address the question of CO_2 emissions from road traffic, and the hon. Gentleman will be aware of the increases in road fuel duties. It is important to bear in mind the overall target for greenhouse gas emissions. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, we

signed up to the convention with other developed countries and it is important that we should have an objective and comprehensible target so that we are able to judge our progress and that of other countries. The hon. Gentleman will note that our progress is very good compared with that of many other countries.

Energy Efficiency

4. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he intends to take to improve the energy efficiency of housing. [3119]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Government operate and support a wide range of programmes and initiatives to improve and promote energy efficiency across all sectors of housing. We will continue to pursue them vigorously.

Mr. Robathan: My hon. Friend and the Department have a good record in energy efficiency in housing. Will he confirm that more than a quarter of the energy use in this country is domestic usage? Will he therefore consider a further tightening of the building regulations with regard to new housing so that new homes use less energy and are among the most energy efficient in the world?

Mr. Jones: If one adds to the energy used in the home for heating and lighting the energy used by machinery within the home and in the generation of electricity, domestic usage accounts for about half of greenhouse gas emissions, so my hon. Friend is right to highlight that point. Yes, we can do a lot with new housing, but the vast majority of housing is older housing, and we must persuade the owners and renters of it to be less complacent about energy use.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: In view of the Minister's comments, with which I entirely agree, does he recall that, in March, the Government came within one vote of being defeated—on a proposal to reduce the level of VAT on energy-reducing materials to that on energy, to encourage precisely the work that he suggests? Has the Department of the Environment made representations to the Treasury to make that reduction in the coming Budget? We were told during the debate in March that the Department would consider such a proposal.

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman will not expect me to anticipate the statement of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor in any regard, but he can be certain that we shall continue our programmes to encourage the extension of energy efficiency equipment and measures in homes.

Mr. Evennett: How seriously are local authorities taking their responsibilities in promoting home energy efficiency? Is there any more that my hon. Friend can do to encourage them to take more action?

Mr. Jones: Many authorities are doing a good job in taking forward the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995. I was fortunate to be able to present the prizes yesterday for the Home Energy Conservation Act programme, facilitated by the Energy Saving Trust with finance from the Department. Other authorities must learn from the best, and that is why we will produce best practice guides as a result of our experience.

Mr. Meacher: Before he preens himself about any improvements, will the Minister say when he will apologise for the Secretary of State's cutting of the funding of the home energy efficiency scheme by fully a third earlier this year, which knocked £31 million off home insulation grants for the poor and elderly? When will he realise that a nationwide home energy efficiency scheme—which we do not have—would save fuel, reduce carbon dioxide emissions, prevent cold-related illnesses and hypothermia and create up to 50,000 new jobs? If he and the Secretary of State do not have the imagination or the vision to introduce such a win, win, win scheme, I can tell him that we certainly will.

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that £30 million was added to the home energy efficiency scheme in anticipation of the second stage of VAT, which was voted down by the House—at which point that £30 million fell. The trouble with the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends is that they want to get on to the pudding even though they have refused to eat their greens.

Capital Challenge

5. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to announce which local authorities have been successful in their bids for funding under the pilot capital challenge scheme. [3121]

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): Before Christmas.

Mr. Hendry: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that one of the key objectives of capital challenge is to assist in the regeneration of some of our historic towns while drawing in investment from the private sector and elsewhere to make that possible? With that in mind, will he give careful consideration to the excellent scheme proposed by High Peak borough council to assist in the regeneration of the historic Georgian and Victorian parts of Buxton to prepare them for the 21st century—a plan which surely deserves success under the excellent capital challenge scheme?

Mr. Curry: I will give careful consideration to that scheme, as I shall all the schemes that have been proposed. My hon. Friend is perfectly right: our intention is to allow local authorities to nominate their own priorities so that the Government choose the authority's priority if it stands up well. My hon. Friend will be interested to know that we have received some 326 bids, and that nearly two thirds of authorities that could bid have done so. He is quite right to say that there is significant leverage. Some £1.5 billion has been bid for, but that money will pull in some £1.2 billion from other public sources and £1.3 billion from the private sector. The scheme is working alongside public and private moneys to help the priorities nominated by local communities.

Business Rates

6. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to review the application of non–domestic rates procedure to assist businesses in difficulties; and if he will make a statement [3123]

Mr. Curry: Local authorities have the power to grant up to 100 per cent. relief to any business that suffers hardship. We will shortly commence a review of that provision, beginning with a detailed analysis of the way in which local authorities use it.

Mr. O'Brien: The Minister will be aware that rates take a large percentage of small businesses' profits and that new businesses have difficulty starting up because of the rate element. Will he extend to urban areas the relief for post offices and shops that is being implemented in rural areas? Will he also consider the problems facing small garages and public houses, which suffer an injustice because their rates are assessed on turnover rather than profit? He knows perfectly well that local authorities cannot afford to give rebates to the extent that he has suggested because of the Government's standard spending assessment; it is for the Government to find resources to help those businesses out of difficulty. Will he accept that the responsibility is his? Will he do something about it?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman will know that there are rural areas as defined in the Local Government and Rating Bill in metropolitan areas, so an area that meets the criteria will benefit from all the advantages that the Bill will bring. The local authority will have the discretion to grant relief up to 100 per cent. to pubs and other businesses, both as a hardship relief and if so doing would serve the interests of the community.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend accept that rural petrol stations are a vital service and that thousands of them have closed in recent times, not least because of the business rate? Bearing in mind the fact that the Government receive the total income from the non-domestic rate, does he believe that the Government should be obliged statutorily to make provision for extra allocation to local authorities that give assistance to petrol stations in rural areas?

Mr. Curry: Under the Bill, local authorities will be able to grant discretionary relief to garages if that is necessary in the interests of the community. If the garage serves as a general store, it will get the full relief, and 75 per cent. of all discretionary relief will be paid by the Exchequer.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I appreciate the concept of discretionary relief, but the problem is that it may not be given. Should not a principle be established that, in development areas, businesses that have been hit should be re-rated immediately and we should not continue to extract from them money that they are not earning? I am thinking particularly of areas such as Sandy Row in my constituency where, for 20 years, through dithering in the Department, businesses have been hampered.

Mr. Curry: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will accept that it is always a great mistake to allow a long time to pass without revaluation. After all, before the revaluation of 1990, there were 17 years without one, which led to an enormous number of appeals when it finally took place. It is important to keep the lists up to date; then, everybody knows where they are and the changes that take place have a greater chance of being widely accepted.

Mr. Pickles: Does my right hon. Friend remember a time when businesses in trouble removed roofs to avoid penal rates of local taxation imposed by the Labour party? When the economy started to improve, those factories were in no position to provide jobs, leaving civic leaders to whinge about the number of cinemas in their towns, as the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) did earlier.

Mr. Curry: I do indeed remember those circumstances; there was a migration of business from some of the places that most needed the revenues, jobs and the income they bring. That is why the Government changed the business rating system to give businesses a chance even where local councils were not prepared to give them one.

Sparsity Allowance

7. **Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many district councils qualify for a sparsity allowance in their standard spending assessment. [3124]

Mr. Gummer: The SSA of every district council reflects sparsity, even where it has a significant urban population, so 14 per cent. of Bassetlaw's SSA comes to it because of sparsity factor.

Mr. Ashton: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that sparsity allowance is essential for rural areas because of the extra costs of refuse collection and public transport, for example? When rural areas were Conservative controlled there was no danger of the allowance being abolished, but now the vast majority are controlled by Labour or the Liberals, is there not a great temptation for the Government to abolish it and use the cash for income tax cuts in next Tuesday's Budget? Will he assure us that that will not happen?

Mr. Gummer: I would like the hon. Gentleman to have a word with the Labour-controlled London boroughs and others who have long pressed for the abolition of sparsity factor. He may have noticed that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration and I have made it clear that recent research broadly supports the present sparsity rules. I have not made a final decision, but I think that it is unlikely that I will want to move from the present system when the evidence shows that it should remain. I wish that the hon. Gentleman would get his Labour friends to stop bashing the countryside.

Mr. John Greenway: My right hon. Friend and I represent rural areas. Does he agree that many of our constituents in the countryside and in rural villages do not enjoy the level of services that people in towns and cities take for granted? Is not that why the Local Government and Rating Bill's measures to protect the small village

post office, general store, public house and garage are so popular with parish councils? Can we be sure that district councils will have sufficient sparsity factor in their standard spending assessments to be able to afford the much needed discretionary relief?

Mr. Gummer: I remind my hon. Friend that 75 per cent. of that money will come from the Exchequer. I also remind him of the Bill's Second Reading, when Labour's Front-Bench spokesmen showed that they knew little—and cared less—about rural matters.

Standard Spending Assessment

8. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on standard spending assessment. [3125]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): We have received a number of representations from local authorities and others on standard spending assessments.

Mr. Pope: Is not it the case that if every council received the same support that Westminster council receives, most of them would be able to pay out rebates on the council tax and, in particular, if Hyndburn council received the same support as Westminster, it would be able to pay a rebate of £612 for every council tax payer in the borough? Does the hon. Gentleman understand the anger that this corrupt system causes?

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Gentleman forgets that, if we went down that route, there would be another 14p on income tax. Perhaps he should examine some of his local authority's expenditure. I understand that it moved its school centre to the wrong location and so had to move it again—and then had to build a new building at a cost of £1.7 million.

Sir Irvine Patnick: My hon. Friend will, like me, be an avid reader of the *Local Government Chronicle*. Does he remember the 5 January 1996 article in which the hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) was quoted as saying that she does not promise to change the present system? Is not it an indictment that Labour is out of ideas and policy and is prepared to keep the existing system as it is?

Sir Paul Beresford: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. He has taken one of the shots that we would have fired at a later date. He is right, and it is interesting to watch the scrabble of feet among the Opposition.

Ms Armstrong: I am delighted that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick) continues to misquote me. I have not given any commitments to additional funding because of the mess that the Government have made, but we will introduce a fair system. How can the Minister justify the current system? Under the Government grant system, the council tax payers of Westminster contribute only 4 per cent. to the cost of their services while, for example, the people of Wirral are expected to pay 24 per cent. Will he promise to change that system?

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Lady should recognise that experts consider the SSA to be the fairest system. However, some Opposition Members do not accept the word of experts. The taxpayer may not pay for any change, but the council tax payer will. First, the hon. Lady will massage the SSA, then she will remove capping, stop compulsory competitive tendering, return the business rate to local councils and introduce new regional authorities such as the Greater London council. I know who will pay for that—the council tax payer.

Mr. Mans: My hon. Friend will be aware of the initiative by Lancashire county council in requesting an independent review of the area cost adjustment. Although such a review may mean that the county gets £20 million less next year, and despite the stupidity of the Labour-controlled county council in asking for one in the first place, will my hon. Friend consider delaying its implementation for at least a year?

Sir Paul Beresford: I appreciate my hon. Friend's concern. The review will be implemented only if we are absolutely sure that the new system is robust and stands up to close inspection.

Energy Conservation

9. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total annual amount spent by his Department on energy conservation in each of the last three years. [3126]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My Department's expenditure on energy efficiency was £68.3 million in 1993-94, £109.9 million in 1994-95, and £132.8 million in 1995-96—a total of £311 million for the three years.

Mr. Canavan: Is the Minister aware that the cut of more than £30 million in the home energy efficiency scheme means that many people—particularly senior citizens—are no longer eligible for grants to insulate their homes or improve their heating systems? Now that the cold weather is upon us again and the last ever Budget of this miserable Tory Government is due next week, will the Minister make strong representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to increase investment in the scheme in order to conserve energy and alleviate some of the hardship that has been caused by the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel and power?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman must have been asleep when the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) asked a similar question. I find that quite understandable, so let me repeat that £30 million was added to HEES in anticipation of the House voting for the second stage of VAT on fuel. As it did not, the £30 million fell. I realise that HEES is extremely popular and successful. Incidentally, it did not exist under the last Labour Government. I assure the hon. Gentleman, however, that eligibility has not been changed in any way, shape or form. Pensioners and disabled people qualify for help under HEES. The fact that those who are better off get a 25 per cent. discount while those on the lowest incomes get a 100 per cent. discount merely reflects the advice that we have received from many that the scheme should be more targeted.

Dr. Spink: Does my hon. Friend recall that, since Labour was in power, we have increased the number of

homes with loft insulation by more than double, to 89 per cent., we have increased the number of homes with cavity wall insulation tenfold, and increased the number of homes with double glazing sevenfold? Does not that demonstrate the success of the Government's policies?

Mr. Jones: That question certainly shows that my hon. Friend takes more interest in the subject than the whole of the Labour party put together. The HEES will have benefited 2 million households. That is an enormous achievement.

Water Companies

10. **Mr. Pearson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received following the publication of the Office of Water Services' report on the financial performance and capital investment of the water companies in England and Wales in 1995 and 1996. [3127]

Mr. Gummer: None. However, I welcome the fact that the report shows that capital investment in the water industry has remained high—far higher than before privatisation. At the same time, the regulator has encouraged companies to reduce their costs and to improve their efficiency.

Mr. Pearson: Is the Secretary of State aware that Severn Trent's profits have virtually trebled since privatisation, and customer bills have rocketed by 44 per cent. more than inflation, but investment has been cut every year since 1991-92? Is he also aware that, since privatisation, Severn Trent has paid absolutely no corporation tax on its mainstream sewage and water businesses? Does that not amount to a double whammy on consumers and taxpayers in the west midlands?

Mr. Gummer: I am aware that, when the water companies were nationalised, they spent an average of £1.6 billion on investment; in comparable terms, they now spend an average of more than £3 billion. The hon. Gentleman should recognise that the mess that was left behind because of public ownership of the water industry has now been cleared up and that people are coming from all over the world to ask British water companies to do their water improvements.

Mr. Hawkins: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the news that, as the result of the huge capital investment by North West Water, the sea off Blackpool's beaches has now been greatly improved and that tourism businesses will benefit dramatically from the good news of Blackpool's beaches now being approved under European Community standards? Is that not a further demonstration that the Labour party's carping criticism does not reflect the reality of real investment to help Britain's tourism industry?

Mr. Gummer: I am certainly pleased by the clean-up of Blackpool's beaches, which was not possible when the water industry was nationalised. I hope that my hon. Friend has noticed that the former Labour leader of Manchester city council wrote to the Canadian authorities to try to undermine North West Water's bid to help the water industry in Canada—again hitting out against the British water industry, British jobs and British investment. I hope that the Labour party will dissociate itself from its prospective candidate for Manchester, Blackley.

Local Government Finance

11. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what local authority delegations he has received concerning the 1997–98 revenue support grant settlement. [3128]

Sir Paul Beresford: I meet representatives of local authorities throughout the year to discuss a range of issues affecting local government. It is, of course, open to all authorities to request a meeting with Ministers during the formal consultation period that follows the provisional settlement announcement later this month.

Mrs. Jackson: Has the Minister read his Government's evidence to a House of Lords Select Committee in which they admit that it is policy that council tax levels should rise? Will he confirm today that the Government's policy is to hike up council tax, possibly by as much as 16 per cent. over the next two years? Does he recognise that that is the 23rd Tory tax rise since 1992 and that he cannot continue to blame Labour local councils for that?

Sir Paul Beresford: I am always sorry for the hon. Lady when it comes to defending her local council in Sheffield, which seems to get itself in straight difficulty. There is a thing called Supertram, which looks more like a black hole. The council's property services department is underselling properties by a huge degree, which is to the disadvantage of the local authority. In addition to that, the department seems to have lost 200 properties. Nevertheless, the authority has rewarded the managers of that service by giving them a £4,000 a year pay rise.

Sir Peter Fry: Does my hon. Friend remember that, among the delegations that came to his Department this year, was one that represented a number of counties and all the major political parties and that was concerned about the unfairnesses of the area cost adjustment? Does he accept that those unfairnesses exist; that they were highlighted in the report by Professor Elliott; and that, if nothing is done to implement the recommendations in that report, those profound injustices will continue to affect Northamptonshire and many other counties?

Sir Paul Beresford: I do recall my hon. Friend's visit with his delegation. As he will be aware, the report contained as many findings for as against, so before we implement the report's recommendations, we must be absolutely sure that they are well founded.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Minister confirm that, as part of the Budget to be announced next week, the Government plan to increase council tax way above the rate of inflation as part of their long-term plan to raise council tax by £3.5 billion—equivalent to adding 2p to the standard rate of income tax?

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Gentleman ought to know better. He has been here far longer than I have, and

even I realise that that is a silly question, which I cannot answer; that will be left for the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the right time.

Mr. Bellingham: Has the Minister heard of an organisation called SPLAT, which stands for Sparsely Populated Local Authorities Team—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's microphone is not on and no one can hear him.

Mr. Bellingham: I think that the Minister heard; I mentioned SPLAT, which stands for Sparsely Populated Local Authorities Team, headed by King's Lynn and West Norfolk borough council and its superb treasurer, David Tate. Can my hon. Friend confirm that representatives have visited his colleague, the Minister of State, and can he confirm that their views and representations will be listened to?

Sir Paul Beresford: I can confirm the point, and yes they are being taken on board and listened to carefully.

Capital Challenge

12. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from local authority leaders concerning capital challenge. [3129]

Mr. Curry: Progress with the pilot scheme is regularly discussed at ministerial bimonthly meetings with the local government associations.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister recognise that council leaders everywhere are worried about the time taken in preparing bids for all those challenge-type schemes? They are fed up with the fact that no extra money is made available for them, they are fed up with the rules continually changing and they are fed up with those schemes not dealing with the urgent priorities of expenditure that exist in many parts of the country.

Mr. Curry: I was expecting the hon. Member to make that comment, because he firmly represents old Labour. Whenever we introduce a scheme, local authority leaders say, "This is terrible; it is new, it is innovative. We want to carry on as we always have," and when it works and it delivers they say, "That was a very good scheme indeed; you ought to continue it."

There is new money—the money we bring in from the private sector. That is what is so good about the challenge programme. It adds private sector money to public sector money, and very many Labour local authority leaders throughout the country will benefit from it and are beginning to appreciate the schemes greatly.

Mr. Ian Bruce: What sort of money is coming from the private sector? My right hon. Friend noted that local authority leaders always say that they cannot find matching funds and then promptly go off and do just that from completely new, non-public funds. Can he give us an idea of how much that has saved for the taxpayer?

Mr. Curry: In the capital challenge programme, according to the bids that we have received, for every £1 bid, £1.70 comes with it, of which 90p is from the private sector. Those are the bids; we expect better figures in the final acceptances.

Rents-to-mortgages Scheme

13. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the take-up of the rents-to-mortgages scheme in 1996. [3130]

Mr. Clappison: Our Department has made no estimate of future sales.

Mr. Cunningham: Given that many people are experiencing mortgage repayment difficulties, would it not have been far better to introduce a scheme for mortgages to rents, instead of that Tory political dogma?

Mr. Clappison: No. I make no apology for a policy that was one of a range of options for enabling tenants to become home owners. As the hon. Gentleman knows, our policies have succeeded in enabling tenants to become home owners—more than 1.5 million have done so since 1979 and many more will have that opportunity under a Conservative Government in future.

Opencast Mining

15. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received in the last three months concerning opencast mining planning applications; and if he will make a statement. [3132]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department has received representations from three members of the public, a firm of solicitors, the Ramblers Association and the hon. Member concerning opencast mining planning applications in the last three months.

Mr. Barnes: Why is the north-east corner of Derbyshire, involving the constituencies of Chesterfield, Bolsover and North-East Derbyshire, bottom of the league when it comes to standard spending assessment per head of population, bottom of the league when it comes to lottery grants, but top of the league when it comes to having its guts ripped out by opencast mining operations and current applications? Should not the rules be changed, so that there is a disposition against opencast mining, rather than the pressure for it from the Government?

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Gentleman had better read the changes that we introduced in MPG 3. I will send him a copy.

Mrs. Peacock: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Secretary of State recently visited the Windsor site in my constituency, and that that could shortly become the subject of an application to Kirklees council for opencast mining? Is he further aware that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) recently visited the constituency to tell local residents that he was the white knight on the charger who would refuse all such applications in the future?

Sir Paul Beresford: I hope that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) also told the nation how much it would cost to import coal, as we shall not have any.

Public Services (Rotherham)

16. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the level of Government funding from his Department for the provision of public services by Rotherham metropolitan borough council in 1996–97. [3133]

Mr. Curry: The main financial support from central Government is the revenue support grant and redistributed national non-domestic rates. Rotherham gets £159,894 million from those sources.

Mr. MacShane: Is it not a fact that if Rotherham and other northern and midlands boroughs got the same money as central Government give to sleaze-ridden Westminster, we would not have to put up council tax? When will the Government treat the rest of the country on a par with their friends in sleaze-ridden councils in London?

Mr. Curry: Westminster, of course, does not get anywhere near the amount of grant that Tower Hamlets receives. If Rotherham were to get the grant of Tower Hamlets, that would clearly be a massive injustice. I intend to see that grant goes where it is most needed, and the inner London authorities are uniformly where it is most needed.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 November. [3146]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mrs. Winterton: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the low level of unemployment in my constituency, Congleton, which has fallen by a further 7.5 per cent. over the past year, would immediately be put in jeopardy if the minimum wage, the 48-hour working week and the social chapter were implemented?

The Prime Minister: I am delighted to hear of the fall in unemployment in my hon. Friend's constituency, and I am delighted that that fall is mirrored in the constituencies of hon. Members right across the House. It is certainly the case that, were extra impositions such as those mentioned by my hon. Friend to be placed on employers, they would stop the fall in unemployment and send it returning upwards. That is not what we want, which is why we shall not accept the social chapter or such impositions.

Mr. Blair: Why has the Prime Minister not yet made good the promise given two years ago to eliminate mixed-sex wards in our hospitals?

The Prime Minister: We are seeking to make progress as soon as we can on every aspect of improvement in the health service. We have given priority to other matters. That has brought the waiting list down, widened the number of operations that have been offered and improved the quality of care. As we can, we shall move on the other issue.

Mr. Blair: My point is that the Government made a specific promise two years ago that that issue would be a priority. Is not what is needed a proper programme that is led and co-ordinated by Government with the health authorities and national health service trusts, and the setting of a specified timetable to eliminate those wards, which cause enormous indignity, and distress people? The Government would thereby keep the promise that was made two years ago.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman seems to be advocating—I agree with him—a properly managed examination of what could be done to improve the service across the health service. I agree with that. It is one of the reasons why we have focused on management. Management has been concentrating on getting more people treated. More people have been treated, and management will continue to move to improve that, and to improve the quality, dignity and privacy of service, as we announced.

Mr. Blair: I find it extraordinary that the Government are spending £1.5 billion more on administration—

Mr. Devlin: He is out of order: he must ask a question.

Madam Speaker: Order. I need no lessons from the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin).

Mr. Blair: Might I point out to the Prime Minister that there are 20,000 more senior managers and that £1.5 billion extra is spent on administration? Is it beyond the collective wit of the Government and the health administrators to deal with that problem? It is a question not just of money, but of political will. My point is very simple: did not the Prime Minister promise two years ago to deal with the problem? Why has he not delivered? If he does not deliver on that promise, why should anyone believe his promises about the national health service?

The Prime Minister: If I had said at the last election that we would treat as many new patients as we are now, the right hon. Gentleman would not have believed me. If I had said at the last election that we would deliver extra resources, he would not have believed me. He and his colleagues claimed that we would privatise the health service. We said that we would not, and we have not. I hope that he accepts that that is the case now, and that it will not occur in the future. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that fact.

Q2. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 November. [3147]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Riddick: Is my right hon. Friend aware that unemployment in my constituency has fallen by 640—22 per cent.—since the beginning of the year? Is not a reason for that good news the fact that the United Kingdom has a stable industrial climate with few strikes, except in the public sector? Is it not true that only a Conservative Government can be relied upon to do anything about that problem because the Labour party, with its strong links to the unions, is still the strikers' friend?*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

The Prime Minister: There seems to be some support on the Opposition Benches for Labour's support of the strikes—I hope that everyone noticed it.

I have no doubt that one of the reasons why we are attracting more foreign investment than any other country is our success in restoring industrial stability in the private sector. The number of strikes today is one twenty-fifth of the level that it was when we came to government in 1979. I believe that people deserve the same protection against strikes in the public sector that they increasingly enjoy elsewhere. If Opposition Members do not agree, I suggest that they ask businesses whose post was not delivered and travellers who could not get to work because of strikes in those sectors.

Mr. Hume: Given the Government's praiseworthy efforts to promote agreement among the political parties in Northern Ireland, will the Prime Minister explain why the Minister responsible for education in Northern Ireland, the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), proposes to reduce the number of education boards—which are the most highly respected cross-community bodies in Northern Ireland—from five to three? During the consultation process, every Member of Parliament from Northern Ireland, the leaders of all political parties, all Church leaders and all local authorities disagreed with the right hon. Gentleman. Why are the Government ignoring the unanimous wish of the people of Northern Ireland in relation to education?

The Prime Minister: I do not believe that that is the position with my right hon. Friend, but I shall examine the details of the hon. Gentleman's claims and then write to him. I would be very surprised if my right hon. Friend did not have an extremely good reason for any decision he may have taken.

Mr. Beggs: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Points of order come after questions, private notice questions and statements.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the average household electricity bill in the eastern area is £272, while in France it is £366 and in Germany it is £394? Does that not demonstrate the success of electricity privatisation? Is not a sign of its success the fact that the Opposition wish to impose a windfall profits tax on the industry and put it at risk?

The Prime Minister: The comparative prices that my hon. Friend quotes are a striking tribute to the success of privatisation over the past 18 years. I am delighted to see them. I very much hope that we shall keep those prices down. My hon. Friend is entirely right: a windfall tax would force prices up for consumers, and at an unknown amount, because we do not yet know precisely who will be subject to the windfall tax or what the levy would be on companies and thence on consumers.

Q3. **Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 November. [3148]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Ms Cunningham: With regard to yesterday's meeting in Brussels, and the beef ban, is the Prime Minister aware that the National Farmers Union for Scotland is openly accusing the Government of straightforward prevarication in their refusal to proceed with the selective cattle cull, and that that gives rise to a very real apprehension that the Government are simply trying to stoke anti-European feeling in advance of an election and, indeed, to sacrifice the farmers? Why does he continue to set his face against a phased lifting of the ban, which would be of immediate benefit to Scotland and Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady is perhaps not aware of all the things that are going on in Brussels and the discussions that we are having, or she certainly would not have asked her question in that fashion.

Mr. Waterson: Can my right hon. Friend give some reassurance to pensioners in my constituency who are worried that the so-called flexible decade of retirement will mean massive increases in public spending and taxes or a severe cut in the state retirement pension?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to say that the plans proposed by the Opposition, in which a flexible decade of retirement would enable some people to retire early, would mean a massive increase in public expenditure, which they have said that they would not provide, or a significant cut in the basic rate of pension. I suggest that they come clean on precisely what they propose.

Q4. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 November. [3149]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Mullin: Is it still the Prime Minister's position that there is a moral case for cutting taxation? If so, can he explain the moral case for promising to cut taxation before an election and for increasing it as soon as the election is over?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I do believe in cutting taxation, and I look forward to the hon. Gentleman's support when it is appropriate to cut taxation again in the future. The hon. Gentleman seems to think that by cutting taxation we are giving money back to people. I would say that by cutting taxation we are taking less of people's own money.

Q5. **Mr. Atkins:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 November. [3150]

The Prime Minister: I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Atkins: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the independent auditor's report, published yesterday, of the criminal and corrupt activities of Labour councillors on Labour-controlled Preston borough council who have lost or mislaid millions of pounds of Preston taxpayers' money in recent years? Does he agree that that is the real example of sleaze and corruption in public life which should be rooted out? Is not that further example of Labour mismanagement of local authorities damning proof of what will happen if Labour ever controls our country?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that the character of any party becomes clear until it is in power. *[Interruption.]* Those are not my words; they are the words of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). In local government, Labour is in power, and in power it has a habit of pouring taxpayers' money down the drain and running up debts. Right across the country, where there are Labour councils one can see that "If you vote red, you live in the red."

Q6. **Ms Hodge:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 November. [3151]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order. It is difficult to hear.

Ms Hodge: Will the Prime Minister think again about his crass and insensitive reply to the question put to him by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair)? Does he appreciate that the issue of mixed-sex wards is of particular importance to women? Does he know that 50 per cent. of women who are admitted to psychiatric hospitals have a history of sexual abuse? Will he give us a date when he will meet the promise that he gave two years ago? If not, how can we believe that the NHS is safe in the Government's hands?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and the hon. Lady spend Question Time after Question Time painting a picture of the NHS that does not exist for those who use it. During our 18 years in office, we have continually put more resources into the NHS, widened the services available to it, ensured that more operations are carried out and cut waiting times. That is a record that no previous Government have been able to match. If the hon. Lady remembers, it was under the previous Labour Government that waiting lists went up, hospitals were closed and the NHS practically came to a full stop.

Channel Tunnel (Fire)

3.30 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich) (*by private notice*): To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the fire in the channel tunnel.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Sir George Young): At approximately 8.45 pm GMT yesterday, a fire broke out in a lorry on board a Eurotunnel freight shuttle inside the channel tunnel between Calais and Folkestone. The shuttle was carrying 29 heavy goods vehicles with 31 drivers and companions, plus three crew members. The shuttle, on its way from France, had a French driver and crew. It stopped 12 miles through its journey on the French side of the tunnel.

Emergency services, firefighters and ambulances, arrived at the scene within 20 minutes and helped evacuate everyone on board the shuttle. Twenty-eight were taken back to France by a tourist shuttle travelling in the untouched northern tunnel, and six were evacuated by the service tunnel transport system. Eight people were taken to hospital, two of whom were detained, including the driver of the shuttle; their condition is reported to be serious but not life threatening. I understand that both will be discharged today.

French and British fire brigades worked through the night to bring the fire under control. The emergency is now over. I am sure that the House will want to join me in congratulating the emergency services on the way in which they coped with the incident and in expressing relief that there were no fatalities.

The French authorities have already begun a formal inquiry. That is for them since the incident happened in the French part of the tunnel. Eurotunnel's own investigation is under way. In addition, the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority, which includes representatives from this country and France, will be making its own inquiry into the incident and studying the reports from the operators and the French authorities. The safety authority's findings will be made public. I shall be urging my French counterpart, Mr. Pons, to ensure that the French authorities publish their findings as soon as they properly can so that the lessons of this incident can be learnt by all concerned.

In the meantime, it would be wrong to speculate on the causes of the fire. I can assure the House, however, that representatives of the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority are on site and will not allow either passenger or freight operations to recommence until Eurotunnel can prove that that can be done safely.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the Secretary of State aware that the House of Commons will be grateful to the firefighters of both countries for their immediate response and the efficiency of the manner in which they carried out the rescue of the drivers trapped in the tunnel? Is he also aware that the safety authority originally recommended that semi-open wagons should not be used for the carriage of heavy goods vehicles? Last July, when I questioned his Department about a new risk assessment of the dangers arising from the carriage of heavy goods vehicles in semi-open wagons, I was told that there was no need for such an assessment, and that everything was for the best in the best of all worlds.

Given that the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority changed its original advice, because it was told that it should take account of the costs and commercial interests of the channel tunnel operators, does the Secretary of State agree that it is imperative that safety be the first assessment? Does he further agree that even if it costs money to enclose heavy goods vehicles in wagons that, last night, would have prevented the spread of toxic fumes and the considerable difficulty caused to the people who had to lie on the floor for 20 minutes, that should be undertaken immediately, irrespective of the results of any inquiry?

Sir George Young: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for what she said about the emergency services. I am sure that the House endorses her comments.

I think that the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority will want to reconsider the shuttle design when the inquiries that I have announced have been completed. The safety authority approved the shuttle design before it was used by Eurotunnel and the other operators. Before approval was given, it carried out extensive fire modelling and full-scale fire tests on a loaded heavy goods vehicle. The CTSA would not have approved the design, had it not been satisfied that its concerns about safety had been met. It is independent of the operators. None the less, I am sure that the authority will return to this matter when we have the results of the three inquiries.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): May I, on behalf of my constituents, add my thanks to those of my right hon. Friend for the work of the Kent fire brigade last night? It was a tremendous tribute to its training and professionalism.

The question of open-sided or lattice-sided lorries was raised as long ago as 1991, when the Select Committee on Home Affairs looked into fire safety in the channel tunnel and serious concerns were expressed. Will my right hon. Friend please ensure that this issue is re-examined, and that attention is paid to the fact that, last night, although passengers should have been evacuated without injury, they were not? Will he ensure that the findings of the three inquiries are published, and that the necessary remedial action, whatever it may be, is taken?

Sir George Young: I am happy to give my hon. Friend the assurances that he seeks. As I have said, I am sure that the CTSA will re-examine the design of the wagons. I made it clear that the results of two of the inquiries will be made public. The third inquiry is the responsibility of the French authority, because it is the lead health and safety authority in this instance.

I also make it clear that I will contact the French Transport Minister to express my wish that he make public the results of his inquiries—as we intend to do with our two inquiries. I am sure that all bodies will want to ensure that the recommendations that emerge from the inquiries are pursued with vigour.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): I, too, strongly praise the bravery of the victims and the heroism of the train crew and the emergency services. Will the Secretary of State assure the House that there will be full public disclosure of the evidence examined by as well as the conclusions of the formal inquiry, the CTSA inquiry and

[Mr. Andrew Smith]

the Eurotunnel report, together with the results of the safety tests on the wagons to which my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) referred, so that the public know that, as a matter of priority, all safety aspects have been thoroughly reviewed and the necessary action has been taken?

Sir George Young: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the way in which he put that question. I agree with him that it is important to reassure the public and to re-establish public confidence in the link. The results of the inquiries to be undertaken in the United Kingdom will be made public. Eurotunnel has made it clear that it wants to co-operate with the CTSA. I will be talking to the French to ensure that the results of their inquiries are published. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that in the interests of re-establishing public confidence, it is important to be as open about the inquiries as one possibly can be.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): May I express my concern for those who were in the channel tunnel last night in very dangerous and difficult circumstances? May I also raise the issue of enclosed freight wagons? I understand that the only reason why the wagons are not enclosed is the fact that a mathematical error was made in the adding up of the weights, which means that the axles cannot take an enclosed wagon.

There are other safety concerns. A passenger train behind the freight train was unable to continue on its journey. We have always been told that, if there were a fire in a train moving through the channel tunnel, that train would continue and the fire would be put out in a siding, so that all passenger trains following behind would be able to go through the tunnel safely.

Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking my constituents in Dover and Deal, who have experienced considerable difficulty today in coping with the ferry problems caused by the large amount of additional traffic through the port of Dover?

Sir George Young: I am sure that those conducting the inquiries will want to examine, among other things, the options available to the driver and the reasons for the decisions that he made. I think that it would be wrong to speculate at this stage, but those conducting the inquiries will want to know how the driver responded to the emergency with which he was confronted.

A fully enclosed design would have reduced the risk of fire spreading, but, as my hon. Friend implied, such a design would have other consequences. I am sure that the CTSA will want to revisit that issue, and I shall ensure that the inquiries deal with the other issues raised by my hon. Friend.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): May I add my congratulations on the way in which the emergency services tackled what could have been a disaster?

Is the Secretary of State aware that Eurotunnel has claimed in the past that the wagons were designed in such a way that they could resist fire for some 30 minutes, and could therefore be safely transported to the end of the tunnel? In the event of their being immobilised, they could be uncoupled, and the train could either continue forwards or be reversed out of the tunnel. In the event of the whole train being immobilised, passengers could be evacuated into the service tunnel, and the ventilation system could be controlled so as to blow the fumes and smoke away from them.

None of that happened. Will the Secretary of State therefore ensure that those factors are fully taken into account in the inquiries, and that the results and the tests are open to the public rather than being cloaked in secrecy, which is the current arrangement?

Sir George Young: I think that the hon. Gentleman will find that the 30-minute fire resistance refers to the passenger coaches rather than the wagons that were carrying the lorries. Certainly, the performance of the ventilation system is important; the inquiries will cover that, and I shall ensure that they take on board the other issues raised by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that, in his inquiries, the weight attributed to the Kent fire brigade is taken into consideration? I understand from some of the accounts that a high proportion of the brigade's total resources were waiting to see whether they would be required. It is very unsettling for us, in this large county, to find that we are given no additional assistance to deal with the enormous transport corridor that is on our doorstep.

Sir George Young: I think that my hon. Friend will recognise that his question deals with a slightly broader issue than the issue covered in my statement. It is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, as it relates to the resources available to my hon. Friend's local authority.

As for pressure on fire services in Kent, the CTSA, which is conducting one of the inquiries, includes as one of its members Kent's county fire officer. I assume that he will bring the issue raised by my hon. Friend to the authority's attention.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Will the Secretary of State ensure that the inquiries are not drawn so narrowly as to exclude examination of Eurotunnel's general stewardship of safety and security in the tunnel? Does he agree that safety and security are, in fact, indivisible? Has not Transec—which I believe is a department within the Secretary of State's stewardship—recently indicated that it nearly closed the tunnel, and are not search arrangements for both commercial vehicles and passengers under review? Is not the work about to be hived off to an agency? Indeed, that may have already happened.

As well as being reassured about the circumstances relating to the fire, and told why assurances were not fulfilled last night, the public need to be satisfied that security is of paramount importance, and that there will be no diminution in the level of security—although there are indications that that might happen.

Sir George Young: Security is important, but the hon. Gentleman will understand that it is not the practice of Ministers to go into details of security arrangements for any particular transport mode. The inquiry will cover

everything that is relevant and I remind him that the CTSA is independent of Eurotunnel. It has been set up under the treaty of Canterbury to advise and to assist the intergovernmental commission on all matters concerning safety in the construction and operation of the fixed link. Those terms of reference are broad enough to cover everything that is relevant to last night's incident.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Is it not to the credit of the Kent ferry industry that, with this terrible disaster in the tunnel stopping traffic going through it, that industry has risen to the challenge and, with virtually no disruption, has provided proper ferry services? Will my right hon. Friend join in the thanks that have already been voiced by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) and that would no doubt be echoed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) to his constituents, who are also involved in the industry?

Sir George Young: Clearly, passengers wanting to get across the channel from both directions have faced enormous difficulties. I understand that there has been a good response from the ferry companies, which, despite today's difficult weather, have been able to accommodate many of the people who would otherwise have remained stranded.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): This is not just a question of being wise after the event. May I refer to the precise question that my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) tabled on 22 July, which was answered by the Minister for Railways and Roads, the hon. Member for Slough (Mr. Watts)? Why is it that the intergovernmental commission was not asked to examine or decline to examine the question of toxic fumes in relation to semi-open wagons? This was not only in a sense predictable, but predicted, foreseeable and foreseen by my hon. Friend.

Sir George Young: The CTSA needs no such directions or instructions from Ministers. It has been set up precisely to advise and assist the intergovernmental commission on all matters concerning safety in the construction and operation of the fixed link. It includes on its membership the Kent county fire officer, the deputy chief inspector of railways, civil engineers and people with health and safety expertise. It has the remit and the capacity to investigate matters that are of concern to it.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that there was excellent co-operation between safety personnel on both the British and French side in what was a frightening incident, mercifully in contrast with the heavy and tragic loss of life on ferry boats in the past? None the less, unless there is a thorough investigation, one cannot be sure that worse things will not occur. Will he promise to include in the range of items to be investigated profoundly the prohibition of combustible materials, particularly those emitting toxic smoke and poisonous smoke fumes?

Sir George Young: I am sure that the inquiries will want to consider those particular issues, but my hon. Friend has reminded the House that the rescue system worked broadly as planned. Of course any casualties are deeply regretted, but there was no loss of life and that is a tribute to the emergency services.

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): Does the Secretary of State recall that, when the House was considering the Act that authorised the construction of the channel tunnel, serious concerns were expressed about the implications of some of the shuttle service's design features and their possible implications for fire safety? Given his emphasis on the safety authority's role, does he also recall that serious concerns were voiced that its role was to react to Eurotunnel's proposals and to assess those, rather than to recommend what might be the most appropriate design to guarantee optimum safety? Will he therefore now ensure that, in the investigation and inquiry into yesterday's unfortunate accident, the safety authority is not precluded from considering whether alternative design arrangements, both for heavy goods vehicle wagons and for wagons carrying motor cars, where there is no segregation between passengers and vehicles, may not be the best arrangements for guaranteeing the public's safety? Will he ensure that the public's safety and the most appropriate design arrangement to secure it, are at the forefront of the minds of all the people who are responsible for considering the results of the inquiry?

Sir George Young: I believe that I am right in saying that both the hon. Gentleman and I sat on the Committee considering the legislation to which he refers. It took a substantially long time to get through the House, due in part, if I may say so, to his objections— *[Interruption.]*— not just on safety; it raised a number of broader issues. Of course, safety considerations must be paramount. As I said earlier, I am sure that the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority will want to consider precisely the issue that the hon. Gentleman has raised—the design of the wagons concerned.

Trade Unions

3.49 pm

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian Lang): I would like to make a statement on the Green Paper on industrial action and trade unions, which I have published today.

Industrial relations in this country have improved beyond recognition since the Government were elected in 1979. In that year, almost 30 million working days were lost through industrial action. Last year, the figure was 415,000—down by more than 98 per cent. In 1994, we lost fewer days than in any calendar year since records began in 1891.

Our industrial relations record—once a music-hall joke—is now a major selling point for the country. Foreign investors appreciate the transformation. It helps to explain why the United Kingdom attracts more inward investment from outside the European Union than any other member state.

The Government's step-by-step reform of industrial relations law has played a significant part in that rehabilitation. It put an end to abuses such as the closed shop and the car park show of hands. It created a fairer balance in the workplace. It created a fairer balance, framed by law, between individual union members and their union's leaders.

The Government began this series of reforms with the Employment Act 1980. We built on that base carefully and after consultation, targeting specific problems in five further rounds of legislation. We have crafted a legal framework which is, on the whole, working very well. Each step along the way was fiercely opposed by Labour Members.

However, the events of this summer have reminded us of the damage and suffering that strikes can inflict. More working days were lost in the single month of August than during the whole of last year. Millions of people had their lives disrupted by strikes on the London underground and on the railways. Firms had their business disrupted by a succession of postal strikes.

Happily, many of the summer's disputes are settled or on the way to settlement, as they should always have been, by negotiation. However, there is a danger that bad examples will be followed. Today, most universities throughout the country are suffering from the effects of industrial action taken by eight different unions. In Scotland, the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers is planning a five-day strike that will paralyse rail travel throughout Scotland from 26 November.

The Government will not stand by and watch the virus of crude strike action flare up again as it did this summer. Our people deserve protection both from excessive use of the strike weapon, which should always be only the weapon of last resort, and from the cynical use of the public as hostages in a dispute.

Our enormously successful privatisation programme has introduced competition in many areas, and we must seek to extend that. Strikes these days are largely concentrated in the public sector and in services where there is little or no competition and therefore little alternative for the public who depend on these services. More than 70 per cent. of all days lost through strikes occur in those areas, where the public sector or monopolies predominate, compared with around 10 per cent. in the 1970s. In those sectors, the scope for inflicting damage is great and the constraints minimal.

It is precisely because some strikes cause disproportionate disruption to the public that the Government must act to mitigate that damage. The proposals in the Green Paper are aimed to contain damage to the public caused by strikes of that kind, especially strikes where the public have no alternative.

I have concluded that a new approach is required—an approach which avoids the difficulty of defining in advance which services are essential. Instead, the Green Paper proposes that strikes should lose immunity if their effects are "disproportionate or excessive".

That is a reasonable and measured approach. It means that unions must think more carefully before embarking on industrial action. They will need to consider what effect their action might have on third parties. If they call strikes that threaten health or safety, or national security, or which cause serious damage to property, or which significantly disrupt everyday life or activities, they could lose their statutory immunity. In other words, the rights of innocent third parties—the public, businesses—will be brought into the equation.

I cannot see how anyone can argue that unions should have immunity from the law to cause such damage or disruption to those not directly involved in their disputes, but directly affected by their strike action. So, if a trade union calls, or threatens to call, action which has or is likely to have disproportionate or excessive effects, the workers' employer, and other businesses affected, could go to court to seek an injunction or interdict either to stop the union or, if necessary, to sue the union for damages. Moreover, anyone who is deprived of goods or services as a result of industrial action with disproportionate or excessive effects could apply for a court order to stop the union. The Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action could assist such applicants.

I repeat that this is a measured proposal. Trade unions that behave responsibly and take the wider public and national interest into account have nothing to fear from it.

The Green Paper contains a number of other proposals to encourage the responsible conduct of industrial action. Strikes should be called only as a last resort. They should not be precipitate—adequate notice should be given to all concerned. That gives time for talks that might avert the strike altogether and gives those likely to be affected by a strike the time to make contingency preparations. At present, unions have to give seven days' notice of industrial action. The Green Paper proposes that the notice period should be increased to 14 days.

Strikes should be called only when the union's members have first voted clearly in support, in a secret ballot. The Green Paper proposes that, henceforth, at least half of those eligible to vote must support the proposed industrial action. Going on strike is a serious decision. It involves breaching contracts; it can have far-reaching effects on the livelihoods of both strikers and others; it can bankrupt firms or lead to factories being closed. So it is right that such action should have the support of a majority of all those who can participate in such a decision.

In addition, the initial ballot should not give a union an open-ended mandate for striking. Trade union members should be able to say from time to time whether they still support the action or whether they are prepared to return to work. The Green Paper therefore proposes that there should be a fresh ballot after two or three months, where action is continuous, or after a specified number of short strikes.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster) *rose—*

Mr. Lang: That fresh ballot will increase the democratic control of trade union members and force all unions to come up to the standards of good practice that some already follow. Opinions on the most appropriate time scales will be welcomed.

The Government have taken the opportunity of the Green Paper to review legislation other than that relating to industrial action. We conclude that most of it is working as intended and is as relevant today as when it was first enacted. In some other—relatively minor—areas, however, some changes should now be considered. The Green Paper suggests changes to remove the obligation on employers to provide certain facilities and information to recognised trade unions. Those matters, like much else in our system of industrial relations, should be left to management and unions to decide for themselves. There is no compelling reason why the law should intervene in that area. I am also suggesting some minor adjustments to remove anomalies in procedures for union elections.

The Green Paper is being issued initially as a basis for consultation. It discusses various options and explains why the Government favour some and not others. It invites views and suggestions. Each major step of our reform of industrial relations legislation has been preceded by consultation, which has ensured that measures have been well targeted and workable. I look forward to receiving constructive comments on the latest set of proposals.

In recent years, our industrial relations have been a remarkable success story. We must build on that success and not allow ourselves to fall back into the old, self-destructive ways. The Government's proposals are designed to ensure that the last vestiges of our irresponsible, strike-prone tradition are removed. They match the expectations of the public as we approach the beginning of the new century as well as the needs of our modern, successful and competitive economy. I commend them to the House.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): The Green Paper is not worthy of the right hon. Gentleman. It does nothing to prevent or to resolve disputes. It is simply a lawyer's charter, an invitation to mischief makers and for political point scoring. It has more to do with the proximity of a general election than with improving industrial relations.

Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House who is in favour of the proposals? Will he tell us whether any of his predecessors, from Lord Tebbit, who held the post from 1981 to 1983, through the following seven Secretaries of State, is in favour? Is the present Home Secretary, the present Chancellor of the Exchequer or the present Secretary of State for Education and Employment in favour of them? Is even the present Secretary of State for Defence in favour? None of them acted on the Green Paper of 1981 or the Tory party manifesto pledge of 1983. Will the President confirm that the Green Paper merely repeats those mantras?

Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House which businesses or organisations representing business are in favour, from small businesses through to the Institute of Directors? Will he tell the House whether the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service or experts in industrial law support the measures? Will he tell us how using words such as "virus" is helpful to improving industrial relations? Is not the Green Paper calculated to inflame and to exacerbate rather than to heal?

What justification has the right hon. Gentleman for the changes he proposes to make in the balloting rules and procedures to deny people a simple majority? Is it not a fact that, on 1 November, on the Radio 4 "Today" programme, he said that he had got that proposal from his local golf club rules? Frankly, that is an insult to everyone engaged in industrial relations. Will he give the House an example of a dispute that would fall into the category of being disproportionate or excessive in effect? How would the courts rule on the effects of actions in a case in which, for instance, access to new technology changed entirely the impact, and therefore the effect, on an individual's companies or groups? Would the proposals help in any way if there were an increase in unofficial strikes?

Will the President tell the House under what circumstances he would have to send in the Official Solicitor to bail out again people who fell into the category of those who had to be imprisoned for refusing to obey an injunction under the Green Paper that he has published today? Does he really think that denying the people the right to time off as union representatives, or the information necessary to sit down and reach agreement with their employer, will help industrial relations in Britain in the late 1990s?

What can the right hon. Gentleman tell us about the role of the Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action? Will he confirm this afternoon that £98,000 a year is spent on that commissioner; that £18,000, at the last count, was spent on a salary for a one-day-a-week post; that in 1995, the last year for which figures are available, only three cases were referred to the commissioner; and that in 1994 no cases were referred to the commissioner? Does he think that that is value for money, and does he intend to use that procedural mechanism under his Green Paper?

Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that, while all of us believe that the life, safety or health of the individual or the nation as a whole are crucial and should be protected, they are definable and, under existing laws, they are achieved? But how would the definition

"significant disruption of everyday life or activities"

be defined on the face of the Bill? How on earth does the right hon. Gentleman think that we would be able to sort out such a mish-mash?

Is this not a Government attempt to sweep away the sensible measures of advice, conciliation, arbitration and mediation; an attempt in the lead-up to a general election to politicise relations which, by the Secretary of State's own admission, are currently better than they have been for many years? Is the statement not a prime example of a Government falling back into what he described this afternoon as "old, self-destructive ways"? This

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right-wing, dogmatic Government are determined to go backwards to a bygone era, rather than forwards to a new century. Enough is enough. It is time to give the people the real ballot they need, to get a new Government with a new vision for a new millennium.

Mr. Lang: At least the hon. Gentleman commented on industrial relations and strikes—unlike the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) who, when invited last July to condemn the strike on London Underground, said:

"I have nothing whatever to say."

Unfortunately, most of what the hon. Gentleman has said is wrong. He asked me who was in favour of the changes, and suggested that none of my colleagues is. I am happy to reassure him that all my colleagues in government support the changes, and are looking forward to the consultation process and the subsequent enactment of the proposals. He suggested that my predecessors might not be in favour, yet in his next breath suggested that all the proposals have appeared in earlier Green Papers. He is wrong—none of the proposals in the Government's package has been contained in previous Green Papers.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that the proposals would make matters worse, but I suggest to him that they are fair, focused and reasonable, and give rights to the public. The proposals are shifting the balance against strikes and strikers as the weapons of first resort, and they will make sure that the unions will be bound in future to consider more carefully before going on strike the implications of their strikes and the effect that they will have on the public for fear of the loss of their immunity.

If the hon. Gentleman wants to consider proposals that would make matters worse, he should look at Labour's proposals—forcing employers to recognise trade unions for bargaining purposes, granting trade unions new legal protections for strikers, giving new powers to trade unions, encouraging—as the right hon. Member for Derby, South would do—a return to secondary picketing, and giving the trade unions a say in the Labour party's manifesto.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that this Green Paper is a pre-election gimmick, but Labour said that in 1979, when 30 million days were lost through strikes, in 1983 and 1987, when the figure was down to 7 million days lost, and in 1992, when the figure for days lost was down to about 500,000 a year. We believe that the measures are well considered and relevant, and will reduce industrial action in those public services where there is no alternative and on which the public depend.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the circumstances where lawyers might benefit, but we contemplate clear guidance on the criteria for what is disproportionate and excessive. I anticipate that, far from thousands suing trade unions, it is more likely that one will be granted an injunction to prevent a strike from happening. More to the point, trade union behaviour will change, and there will be fewer strikes as a result of the proposals.

The hon. Member asked about majorities, and pressed me to give an example. Under the Companies Acts, there are proposals that require a majority of those eligible to vote, so the proposal is well precedented. He suggests that it is our purpose to sweep away ACAS, but I can reassure him that the Government have no intention whatever to reduce or diminish the powers of ACAS. We believe that arbitration and conciliation are essential prerequisites to the resolution of industrial disputes, and are far more relevant to their resolution than the spontaneous industrial action that has become the norm in recent months in the public services.

We have heard evidence from the hon. Gentleman that Labour will always choose to side with the union leaders who bankroll the party, rather than the ordinary public when their interests are threatened. Labour has a shameful record on industrial relations—not just in office, but throughout its opposition to every measure that we have introduced to transform industrial relations in this country. This Green Paper contains a further package of proposals that are relevant and will continue that improvement.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Tory Back Benchers seem to be on strike—we have only the flying pickets.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): As a previous Secretary of State for Employment, I entirely support and welcome the Green Paper. Does not history show that every piece of legislation that has been introduced by the Government on industrial relations has been opposed by the Labour party, and that on every occasion it has been wrong? The people who would support the proposals are the public, who are entirely fed up with having their essential services, especially transport services, messed up as they have been over the past 12 months and in the preceding years.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. It was noticeable that, when the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) asked which bodies supported the proposals, he did not ask whether commuters or consumers supported them, because he knows perfectly well that they do.

My right hon. Friend is also right to draw attention to the Labour party's record, both in government and in opposition; it has opposed at every step our improvements in industrial relations: secret ballots in place of car park meetings, the abolition of the closed shop, and getting rid of secondary picketing. It is clear that Labour would reintroduce trade union powers and begin to reverse our successes of recent years. We are determined to continue with our improvements, and the Green Paper offers a way in which to do that.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I remind the House that this is not a time for statements; it is a time for brisk questions, and I hope that the Secretary of State will reply equally briskly.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): Is not the fact that the proposals are in a Green Paper rather than in one of the political gimmick Bills that are flowing forth from other Departments evidence that not even a Conservative Government would really try to implement them? Would not the opportunity for vexatious litigation in which anyone could argue about the meanings of disproportionate and excessive simply amount to a charter

for lawyers to make a fortune? Surely it would be better to promote no-strike deals, involving workers taking a reward in exchange for voluntarily giving up the right to strike. Is not this an example of the most blatant pre-election politics?

Mr. Lang: We are not contemplating taking away from workers the right to strike. The hon. Gentleman has clearly misunderstood the position. I have already answered the point about lawyers. If we had produced a White Paper or legislation, the Opposition would have been the first to complain that we had not first produced a Green Paper. We have produced a Green Paper before every industrial relations reform measure, in order to consult on it and proceed by consensus. The people who do not form part of that consensus are those in the Labour party, because they are in the pay of the trade union movement.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: May I first apologise to my right hon. Friend for being so eager to get in that I leaped up before I should have? Does he agree that the very fact that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said that the proposals had been published with an election in view proves that he knows that they will be extremely popular? The Post Office strike has done more to undermine the public's belief in the Post Office than anything that anyone else could have done; it was a disaster that should never be repeated.

Mr. Lang: I welcome my hon. Friend's introductory remarks. She is right to say that, if we do not legislate before the general election, we shall have no hesitation whatever in inviting the electorate to endorse the proposals. The mail strike was one more example of how public monopoly services are the most prone to strikes these days; they now account for 70 per cent. of industrial action, whereas the figure was previously 10 per cent. That is a measure of how the private sector has come to its senses, and we must ensure that the public monopoly services do the same.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): Is it not ironic that the party that will not allow its members to elect either its chairman or its national executive committee is trying to introduce the most draconian conditions imposed on any trade union movement in Europe? Will the Secretary of State confirm that, if immunities are lifted from trade unions in the circumstances that he has outlined, it will take the trade union movement back to where it was before the 1906 Taff Vale judgment?

Mr. Lang: The trade union movement has made great advances in the past 17 years; at long last, it has a framework of law and a democratic base on which to conduct its affairs honourably and properly. As for the proposals being draconian, I should point out that Britain has much less protection than other countries against strikes in essential services; there are far more robust measures in Germany, Belgium, France and Japan than are proposed in the Green Paper.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Does my right hon. Friend agree that unions and their leaders and members have, in competitive industries, combined and co-operated with employers to bring in more inward investment and to raise productivity? Does he accept that it is right to concentrate on the monopoly industries? He seems to have found an elegant way forward in that respect.

May I warn my right hon. Friend that the words "at this time" in paragraph 3.6 of the Green Paper, the health and safety proposal, would be strongly opposed by employers and by many Conservatives, who believe that the right of union and employee representatives to information on health and safety issues is one of the reasons why our health and safety record is so much better than that of most other European countries?

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I look forward to the consultation process, which will no doubt yield comments on that point. He is right to focus on the importance of good industrial relations in attracting inward investment. It is surely no accident that, while strikes in the manufacturing sector have fallen by 99 per cent. since the Government came into office, productivity in that sector has increased by more than 70 per cent., and in consequence we have attracted more inward investment than any other country in the European Union.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): Is the Secretary of State aware of the report of Mr. Denis Tunnicliffe on the causes of the underground strike in the summer? One headline said: "Our mistakes led to strikes, say Tube chiefs". The report stated:

> "Communication within the company is weak. In particular and at all levels, constructive discussion and resolution of relevant business, performance and behavioural issues is often either absent or ineffective.
>
> As a result, issues do not get adequately addressed and problems fester and grow."

How, then, can the public bring an action against management for disproportionate or excessive damage to their interest? Should not the Secretary of State consider proper penalties for employers who are not prepared to discuss matters with their employees or to recognise trade unions, and accept that their Victorian attitudes cause disproportionate damage to the long-suffering British public?

Mr. Lang: It sounds as though the hon. Gentleman is advancing an argument for privatisation. It has been most noticeable that the management of the public sector organisations has improved dramatically after privatisation. The hon. Gentleman asked about the public suing management. Management does not enjoy the civil immunities that trade unions enjoy. It is those civil immunities that are addressed by our proposal on disproportionate and excessive effects.

Sir David Madel (South-West Bedfordshire): As a growing number of welcome no-strike deals are being voluntarily entered into, will my right hon. Friend pay special attention in the consultation process to what should happen when trade union leaders persistently recommend no strike but unofficial action takes place? We need to get that right. Is the new commissioner not to intervene in a dispute until ACAS has exhausted its efforts for a settlement?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend's first point will certainly be taken into account in considering industrial relations matters. It is not addressed by the "disproportionate and

[Mr. Lang]

excessive effects" proposal in the Green Paper, but should be further considered. The Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action can provide assistance to an individual if unlawful action is likely to deprive that person of goods or services. He can help that individual to seek an injunction either to prevent the action or to get it called off.

In answer to the point made by the hon. Member for Brightside, which I omitted to answer in my initial response, the Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action dealt with 684 inquiries in 1995-96. The commissioner is the same person as the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members, a statutory officer who has assisted, inter alia, the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) in her dispute with the Civil and Public Servants Association.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the Secretary of State agree that, while we must always try to balance the rights of employees and the interests of the community and of employers, there is a real danger that we could deny the legitimate expression of grievance? What protection does he propose to introduce to protect the legitimate rights of employees?

Mr. Lang: We have no proposals whatever to inhibit the legitimate expression of rights by employees. We propose that, when a union is contemplating industrial action, it will have to consider the effects of that action on the public. Too often in the past the public have been the innocent victims of industrial disputes. Now we are insisting that they are brought into the equation, and that they have rights that unions must take into account before deciding to embark on industrial action.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North–East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that strikes are an outdated method of settling industrial disputes? Does he also agree that strikes in essential services such as those on the underground and in the Post Office are, in effect, a blackmail of the community, and are unacceptable to civilised society?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am sure that the view that he has expressed is held by the great majority of the British people.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is it not nothing short of sheer hypocrisy for the Government to send a Minister to the Dispatch Box to talk about the bravery of the firefighters in Kent, the train drivers and others in the public services who saved lives, and then, about half an hour later, another tinpot Minister attacks those very same people, because, very rarely, they have the audacity to tell their Tory bosses, "Enough is enough," and threaten industrial action?

Let me remind the Secretary of State that the last Tory Prime Minister who went to a general election on the question, "Who rules Britain?"—he has just left the Chamber—failed, of course, to win. People can see this for what it is—an election gimmick. If the Secretary of State wants to deal in a fair society, he should remember that it takes two to cause a strike. It is not just employees. On many occasions, bosses deliberately cause strikes, against the background of mass unemployment. The Government have encouraged that throughout their 17 years. Thank God they are on the way out.

Mr. Lang: I think that I heard the hon. Gentleman say that before the 1992 election, the 1987 election and the 1983 election. We shall see. As for putting people at risk, I wonder what his view is about the strike called by Derbyshire fire services against Labour-controlled Derbyshire county council. Our proposals would bring the public into the equation and give them the right to take action if they were put at risk as a result of the action of Derbyshire fire services.

Mr. Skinner: I was negotiating a settlement; I was ACAS.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Was it not somewhat inconsistent of the Communication Workers Union to seek to punish the public by the withdrawal of their mail, having argued that the Post Office should not be privatised because it should remain a public service? Is there any relation between the fact that there have been strikes in the Post Office but not in British Telecom, and the fact that one is privatised and the other is not?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. The introduction of competition and the breaking of monopolies is one way to undermine such attitudes that hold the public to ransom. Clearly we must do more on the privatisation front.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): As trade unionists are consumers and consumers may well be trade unionists, are we not unnecessarily polarising the issue? Is it not the case that people may be deprived of goods and services by industrial action that is proportionate and not excessive? Is it not a matter of judgment as to which actions may be excessive? Individuals will have different interpretations, which are bound to lead to a plethora of cases being brought before the courts. What steps does the Secretary of State intend to take to limit the number of cases that may be repetitive or vexatious?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is right—it is a matter of judgment. Individuals and organisations that seek to take action will need to judge whether they have suffered disproportionate or excessive effects. Before calling a strike, the trade unions will need to decide whether the effects of that strike on the public, industry or the community at large might be disproportionate or excessive.

We are setting out criteria in the Green Paper to give guidance on the matter. We are consulting on it, and we shall develop the proposals further. However, the underlying principle is clear: where disproportionate and excessive effects take place, the immunity of the trade union is, and rightly should be, forfeit.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the welcome that the Green Paper will get from London Underground commuters and the customers of the Post Office, who would say "sooner rather than later" of legislation? Does he remember how the strikes on the underground and in the postal service

embarrassed the Leader of the Opposition this summer? Yet this afternoon, we have heard the authentic voice of old Labour.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right. We on Conservative Benches are the commuters' friend—the Labour party is the strikers' friend.

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): Is not the statement by the Secretary of State in complete contradiction to the remarks made by the Prime Minister during Question Time today? He was boasting about the tranquillity of the relationship with trade unions. The Secretary of State has contradicted those boasts about how well everything is going.

The Secretary of State mentions the days lost through strikes, but how about the days—a hundred times as many—lost through unemployment? What about cowboy employers—are they to have no responsibility? They are not included in the document. This announcement shows that this is a fag-end Government, who think that they are on to some sort of gimmick—but they will lose the general election.

Mr. Lang: It seems to have escaped the hon. Gentleman's notice that, for the past four years, while industrial action in this country has been reduced, unemployment has been falling. We are addressing the rise in industrial action in August this year and the preceding months, which reversed that trend, and in which action was focused on public sector services. That is where the public suffer most, and we are proposing this action so as to bring the public's rights into the equation.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I give a wholehearted welcome to my right hon. Friend's statement and his Green Paper on behalf of the beleaguered commuters and small businesses of my constituency. When taking representations on his Green Paper, will he reflect on the fact that, if we had accepted at face value representations from people such as Labour Members and trade unions—who will no doubt beseige his office with all sorts of false representations—we would have got nowhere over the past 17 years, and would still be stuck with the awful industrial relations record we inherited from the last Labour Government?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. All the industrial indicators point to the success of our industrial relations policy—improved productivity, attraction of huge inward investment, falling unemployment and all the other measures of industrial success. Unless we address the remaining specific problem of industrial action in the monopoly public sector industries, we shall continue to suffer from the growth and recovery in industrial action that will damage those successes.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): Is there any strike that the Secretary of State would support?

Mr. Lang: I believe that strikes should be the weapon of last resort, not of first resort. Through a series of step-by-step proposals, this Government have achieved great things in industrial relations; we now intend to take another positive step in that direction.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): In the entire history of British industrial relations, can the right hon. Gentleman recall any occasion on which he found the management at fault?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Lady was clearly not listening to my earlier answer on that subject. Management does not enjoy immunity to civil lawsuits as trade unions do. It is open to anyone to take out a lawsuit against management if it is believed to be responsible. We are concerned with the fact that trade unions, while sheltering behind immunity from civil actions, make decisions that do not take proper account of the damage they inflict on the public.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Does the Secretary of State recall that it was Stanley Baldwin, a Conservative Prime Minister, who said in reference to the Taff Vale decision—the last time that immunity was removed from industrial action—that Conservatives need not complain about the class war, because they started it? Does the right hon. Gentleman understand that no one outside the House will be fooled by his talk of protecting innocent third parties, but will see his proposals for what they are—a naked class attack on the workers of this country?

Mr. Lang: I think that they will see the hon. Gentleman and his party as standing for the past, while industrial relations have made great strides forward in the past 17 years. I invite him to address the gains that have been achieved, not only for the country as a whole, but for trade union members themselves, as a result of the measures that we have introduced.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does not the truth in this trade union-bashing document lie at the top of page 17, where it is made clear that the Government are totally opposed to trade unionism? Is it any surprise that the Government want to return to the industrial climate of the years before 1906, with no immunities for trade unions, sweatshops, miserable wages and no effective protection for working people? It is not trade unions that are the enemy within in Britain today—it is this wretched Government, who are the dedicated enemy of every working person in this country.

Mr. Lang: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can tell me why we have a higher proportion of our working-age population in employment in this country than any other comparable country in Europe, and why they enjoy better living standards than ever they did under a Labour Government.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): A quiet question of fact: what legal advice has the Department had on how the courts would interpret the word "disproportionate"?

Mr. Lang: Advice within Government is, of course, private to Government, but we are confident that these proposals are workable and will be effective; that, given

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the criteria and the guidance that will be included in the legislation, they will work effectively; and that the courts will responsible positively to them.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Have we not seen another general election ploy here, whereby the Tories set out to clobber the unions and clobber the working people of this country? How many times have we heard from Conservative Members that they do not want the minimum wage or the 48-hour directive? They do not want anything—they do not want the workers to get anything at all. The Green Paper proves that all they want to do is to keep the working people of this country down at the bottom. Some Conservative Members could not live on what some of my members are making in my constituency. I would like to see some of the Ministers live a month on some of the wages that my constituents have to live on.

Mr. Lang: What we want is a successful, expanding economy, creating new, prosperous, well-paid jobs.

Mr. Campbell: You have not got one.

Mr. Lang: That is our record of achievement, and we are determined to uphold that record.

Mr. Campbell: We are a low-paid economy; that is what you have got.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat. He had an opportunity to put a question. I did not hear a question from him, as a matter of fact.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Who were the authors of this document? Paragraph 1.16 on page 6 claims that many strikes

"are called before negotiation and other means of resolving disputes have been fully explored."

That is patently untrue.

Is it not the case that many strikes or industrial disputes are provoked by over-powerful and inefficient management, rather than militant trade union representatives? Was that not the case in the ScotRail disputes that the Secretary of State mentioned, and the Post Office dispute? Why, in the interests of balance, does he not seek to protect the interests and needs of employees against over-powerful employers?

Mr. Lang: In the private sector, the quality of employers and management has improved beyond recognition in recent years. As for the ScotRail dispute, 21 of the 22 train operating companies have reached a settlement on that dispute; only in ScotRail are the trade unions holding out and threatening to paralyse Scottish rail travel for five days in pursuit of an industrial dispute. I urge them to do what the other 21 companies have done—sit down and negotiate a settlement, and not put the public at risk.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I thank the Secretary of State for taking me back about 10 years to a tedious international conference at which I heard the communist Minister of Labour in Poland explain why the Polish public had to be protected against democratic trade union action. Has he consulted the International Labour Organisation? At least one of his proposals will be in contravention of a convention that Britain has signed.

Mr. Lang: That is highly unlikely, but the consultation period runs for three months, and I look forward to receiving the hon. Gentleman's contribution.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May I say that the Minister is going too far? These measures are an affront to liberty. They breach every fundamental principle of freedom of the individual, which many Conservative supporters in the country subscribe to. What he is doing today shows that he has completely misunderstood Conservative supporters in Britain, who feel very strongly on these issues—perhaps in a way that the right hon. Gentleman does not understand.

Mr. Lang: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman does not understand how strongly the public feel on these issues when they are left abandoned by trains whose drivers are on strike, or when they are unable to receive mail because the post is on strike. They too have rights, and those rights should be taken into account.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): Is it not reprehensible to make this further attempt to screw the trade unions, when wages are abysmally low and job insecurity is uppermost in people's mind? When will the Government realise that what is needed is not oppression and tyranny, but partnership and co-operation in industry? That is the way ahead for Britain.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman talks about jobs and wages. Is he not aware that 150,000 new jobs in manufacturing alone have been created in the past three years? Is he not aware that wages at all levels are higher in real terms by a substantial margin than when his party was in power? There should indeed be partnership, but it should involve the public as well. They have a right to be considered in that partnership.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): What does the Minister consider trade unions to be about? Are they not supposed to be involved in negotiating on behalf of their members in various areas of interest? For that they need influence, in order to get their side heard. Their means of last resort, the strike, will be taken away from them in many cases.

Mr. Lang: Too often, what should be the means of last resort is becoming the means of first resort. We are concerned to make the strike the instrument of last resort and to make sure that other factors, such as the public interest, are taken more fully into the equation.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): How can the Minister respond to a 99 per cent. fall in days lost through industrial action by complaining about excessive resort to the strike weapon? Surely the juxtaposition shows that that is simply election propaganda, rather than a proper industrial relations issue.

Mr. Lang: Clearly the hon. Gentleman did not hear me point out that strikes in public utility services, which

constituted 10 per cent. of the total 10 years ago, now constitute 70 per cent. of the total. That is where the problem now exists, and that is why we are addressing it.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Has the Secretary of State not understood that there are many occasions when working people, through their trade unions, stand up for their rights? Those interests and rights are complementary to those of the public. Is it not a fact that, time and again, health and safety issues affecting workers, which have been pursued with vigour by trade unions, have meant that many accidents have been avoided in our public sector, and where those representations have been ignored, tragedies have come about?

Is it not a fact that the trade unions have been a force for good in promoting the interests not only of the workers but of the general public? Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that, and explain why it is good to have trade unions in some industries, but why he defends the right of some miserly, mean employers to exclude trade unions where it suits their selfish interests and not those of their competitors?

Mr. Lang: What a long and complicated question. Let me point out to the hon. Gentleman that health and safety considerations are high on our list of priorities and constitute one of the criteria set out in the Green Paper that should be taken into account in assessing whether a strike is disproportionate or excessive. Strikes are far more likely to damage the health and safety of the public—and, indeed, of workers—than they are likely to advance it.

Mr. Blunkett: Perhaps the Secretary of State could answer one simple question. In view of our overall concern for the user and consumer of services, does the legal advice that he has taken suggest that the London Underground dispute this summer would have met the definition of "disproportionate" or "excessive" in terms of its effects?

Mr. Lang: If these proposals had been in place at that time, my guess is that that strike would not have taken place.

Points of Order

4.38 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. With reference to the Prime Minister's challenge to the comments made by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), I ask whether such a challenge was justified, bearing it in mind that early-day motion 93 tabled on 29 October was on record in the House, showing that every elected representative in Northern Ireland opposed the proposals to reduce the number of education and library boards from five to three.

Madam Speaker: I noticed that the hon. Gentleman got excited when the Prime Minister gave his answer during Question Time. However, the matter he raises with me now is not a point of order but a point of argument, and I may accept only points of order.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. On the significant point of principle as to whether hon. Members should be allowed to have their say before British troops are irrevocably committed to a dangerous situation, has the Secretary of State for Defence disclosed to you when he wishes to report to the House on the factual findings of Brigadier Jonathan Thompson and his reconnaissance team? He should report to the House so that he may hear hon. Members' comments on the subject before the Cabinet decides irrevocably to commit British forces to Zaire.

Madam Speaker: I have not been informed that the Secretary of State for Defence, or any other Secretary of State, is seeking to make a statement about Zaire today. I refer the hon. Gentleman to my comments yesterday, which I still have very much in mind.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I shall not point out that the Tories ran out of questioners halfway through the statement of the President of the Board of Trade. Did you notice that the Labour spokesman was joined by the spokesmen from the Scottish National party, the Welsh National party, the Ulster Unionists and the Liberal Democrats in opposing the statement? Is there any way of putting that fact on record?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is trying to continue questions on the statement. He should have caught my eye at the appropriate time rather than seeking to use points of order in that way.

Orders of the Day

Firearms (Amendment) Bill

(Clauses Nos. 1 to 5 and any new Clauses and Schedules appearing on the Order Paper not later than Friday 15th November which relate to the prohibition of small firearms or to further special exemptions from the general prohibition of small firearms.)

Considered in Committee. [*Progress, 18 November*].

[MR. MICHAEL MORRIS *in the Chair*]

Clause 2

SLAUGHTERING INSTRUMENTS

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

4.41 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): Clause 2 provides that a person does not need the Secretary of State's authority, under section 5(1)(aba) of the Firearms Act 1968 as inserted by clause 1 of the Bill, to possess, purchase, acquire, sell, or transfer a slaughtering instrument if he is duly authorised by a firearms certificate. The Secretary of State's authority will not be required for a person to have a slaughtering instrument in his possession if he is already entitled, under section 10 of the 1968 Act, to possess it without a firearms certificate. That will allow a slaughterman licensed under the Slaughterhouses Act 1974 or the proprietor of an abattoir to continue using a slaughtering instrument as part of his normal duties.

For many years, the firearms Acts have exempted licensed professional slaughterers from the need to hold certificates and we propose that that should be allowed to continue. The instruments that they use—many of which have a captive bolt—pose no threat to the protection of the public. We believe that in those cases it is right to allow the chief officer of police the discretion to grant section 1 certificates to such people. He will be able to assess each case on its merits.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) is the Government Whip on duty, it seems appropriate to ask about starting pistols used at athletics meetings. There are all sorts of anomalies; will that one be covered?

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman is ahead of the Committee's discussions. The issue of starting pistols will be debated under one of the clauses—I think it is clause 4—that we shall discuss this afternoon.

We believe that it is right that the chief officer should be able to assess each case on its merits and that it would be unnecessarily bureaucratic to require people in this category to obtain the Secretary of State's separate authority.

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): It is essential that such people are able to possess and use the appropriate instruments, and we support the special exemption. As to bureaucracy, it seems a little elaborate to include two clauses—clauses 2 and 3—that appear to say the same thing. Perhaps my hon. Friend might consider tidying up the legislation on Report.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3

FIREARMS USED FOR HUMANE KILLING OF ANIMALS

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Miss Widdecombe: Clause 3 provides that a person does not need the Secretary of State's authority, under section 5(1)(aba) of the Firearms Act 1968 as inserted by clause 1 of the Bill, to possess, purchase, acquire, sell or transfer a firearm held on a firearms certificate that is subject to a condition that it is to be used only for the humane killing of animals. That would cover not only vets and Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals officials but others, including hunt servants, whom the chief constable is satisfied have a genuine need for a handgun for that purpose. That may involve producing evidence to prove that need.

Vets and others have long used handguns for the humane killing of animals, and it would be wrong to expect or require them to change their practices. We accepted the argument that the alternatives available, such as rifles, shotguns and tranquilliser darts, would not be as effective. The advantages of using pistols to put animals out of their misery are obvious. The circumstances of the exemption are clear and only professionals or other experienced persons will be able to prove their need to the chief officer.

We believe that in those cases it is right that the chief officer of police should have the discretion to grant section 1 certificates and that each case should be assessed on its merits. We believe that it would be unnecessarily bureaucratic to require such people to obtain the Secretary of State's separate authority.

Mr. Dalyell: Does the exemption have the agreement—which seems to be implied—of the British Veterinary Association? Has that group been consulted and has it agreed to the exemption?

Miss Widdecombe: The organisation has made its views known and it is beyond me why it would not agree to our proposal, given that vets clearly must be exempt.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4

RACES AT ATHLETIC MEETINGS

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Miss Widdecombe: Clause 4 provides that a person does not need the Secretary of State's authority, under section 5(1)(aba) of the Firearms Act 1968, to possess, purchase, acquire, sell or transfer a firearm that is held on a firearms certificate with the condition that it is to be

used only for starting races at athletic meetings. The clause also provides that a person other than a certificate holder, such as a race official, may possess a firearm at an athletic meeting in order to start races.

Most starting pistols—for example, those commonly used at school sports days—do not have an open barrel and are simply designed to make a bang. They are not classed as firearms and the legislation would not affect them. According to the British Athletics Federation, major athletics events require starting guns that are classed as firearms. For technical reasons, starters require a gun that can produce a very loud bang and a highly visible flash from the muzzle. Special blank ammunition is used for that purpose. The visible flash is required to notify the manual timekeepers who are required to act as a back-up in case the electronic systems fail.

Such accurate timekeeping is essential only for races where international, national or regional records will be set and such records are recognised only when a BAF starter is present. We understand that a .22 pistol would not be suitable for that task as it would not produce either a bright enough flash or a loud enough bang. A firearms certificate for a starting gun will not allow the possession of live ammunition as race starters require only blank rounds.

We believe that it is right that the chief officer of police should have the discretion to assess each case on its merits and that it would be unnecessarily bureaucratic to do it any other way.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5

TROPHIES OF WAR

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 2, line 37, after 'possession', insert

'and if the firearm is deactivated or disabled from firing in a prescribed manner'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 3, in page 2, line 37, at end add—

'(2) In this section "prescribed" means prescribed by the Secretary of State by regulations made by statutory instrument.'.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Sir Michael—

The Chairman of Ways and Means: Order. I apologise for interrupting the hon. Gentleman, but I am Chairman of the Committee.

Mr. Henderson: I apologise to you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your correction.

Clause 5 exempts from the provisions of the Bill trophies of war that were acquired before 1946, which have been authorised by certificate.

When I first read clause 5, I assumed that it related to what would probably be described by a layperson as an antique gun—a gun that would not be very usable nowadays, and one that had been acquired over time. I have discovered that that is not so and that many guns that are trophies of war are essentially the same in design as guns that are manufactured today and have the same lethal powers.

I do not believe that there is any great risk from many of the holders of such trophies of war. Most of them are very responsible people and they retain such weapons to remind them of the past and of their family's contribution to war efforts. The danger is that such weapons might fall into the wrong hands and that ammunition might then be provided from another source, thus turning them into lethal weapons.

When hon. Members agree that something must be done quickly, there is a sometimes the temptation to ignore detail. We can all be guilty of that, but I hope that the Government will acknowledge that potential danger. If they do not accept the wording of our amendments, perhaps they will consider another form of words that would take on board the points that I have made.

The definition of a trophy of war is not particularly tight. I quote from Home Office guidelines, "Firearms Law: Evidence to the Police", which say:

"All persons retaining trophies of war must hold firearm certificates, although no fee is payable,"—

and we all understand that.

"In general, the term 'trophy' may be interpreted fairly widely when persons of good repute wish to retain possession of a firearm as a personal memento without the ammunition necessary for its use . . . Weapons issued or captured during the 1939-1945 war and subsequently are Government property and their retention is not permitted."

We are not talking about legally held trophies of war from the 1939-45 war. I am told by the police that it is possible that many equivalents to trophies of war obtained by individuals have been given certificates that apply to guns manufactured between 1939 and 1946. Either a blind eye has been turned by the Ministry of Defence or the police were told originally that the gun was manufactured before 1939. I am told that many of them were manufactured between 1939 and 1945, often in Europe and often brought back as a memento of various campaigns during the second world war.

Other trophies of war manufactured before 1939 are legitimately held. I quote from *Jane's Infantry Weapons*, which says that the 9 mm Browning high-power pistol, which was the same gun used by Hamilton at Dunblane

"was designed in 1925 by John M. Browning and granted a US Patent in February 1927.

The High Power has been manufactured"—

on licence—

"in Belgium by F. N. Herstal SA, near Liège.

It was in service in Belgium, Denmark, Lithuania, Netherlands and Romania."

It has been used since and is still in production in India. As we all know, it is a lethal weapon. I believe that if it got into the wrong hands it could still be used by a maniac such as Hamilton to cause destruction and devastation in a community. The Government must address that possibility.

Another gun that is common as a trophy of war—again it was manufactured before 1939 but was still in production up until 1985—is the .45 model 1911A1 automatic pistol. It is a classic pistol used by the US army. Essentially, the design has remained the same. It would take a firearms expert to draw a distinction between one

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of the models made pre-1939 and one made after that date. The point that I am trying to make is that guns are available—this relates to guns above .22 calibre—that are not antiques but are lethal weapons and are more or less the same as guns that are available today, and have been rightly classified as trophies of war. These potential weapons are not covered by clause 5. I hope that the Government will accept that there needs to be some way of ensuring that such guns are not used for purposes for which they were not intended.

It would be wrong to have a general policy of deactivating guns, for all the arguments that were exchanged across the Floor in yesterday's debate. If guns were to be dismantled, it would be too easy for a part kept in one place to be associated with another part kept elsewhere. In relation to trophies of war, however, because we are talking about a relatively small number of guns, it would be possible to make them safe by deactivating them. That should be done without causing damage to the gun. I hope that the Government will look at ways in which that could be achieved.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: The whole world of guns, weapons and collectors would be absolutely delighted if there was any way of knowing how to deactivate a gun without damaging it, as that would be a solution to many problems.

Mr. Henderson: I hope that it will be possible to examine that. Lord Cullen suggested, in paragraph 9.94 of his report, that one area for discussion might be a barrel lock system. I am no gun expert and I do not know whether it would be possible to use such a device to deactivate a gun safely and without damaging it, but the House has an obligation to not only the people of Dunblane but the people of this country to take every step to ensure that legally held guns do not get into the wrong hands. I have mentioned a potential loophole; I hope that the Government will accept that it exists. It affects only a small number of people, but we must deal with it. The danger is not from the holders of trophies of war but that those trophies of war may get into the wrong hands and be used for purposes for which they were not intended.

I ask the Government to accept the point that I have made. If they accept the Opposition's amendments, that would be satisfactory. If they believe that our amendments are technically flawed, I should be happy to co-operate with them in finding another way to address the problem.

5 pm

Sir Jerry Wiggin: The effect of the amendment is abundantly clear and the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) has explained lucidly what is in his mind. If he adopts the view that there shall be no dangerous handguns that could be fired if the right ammunition was obtained illegally, I understand his point of view. But we are talking about weapons that are held for some historic, personal or domestic reason.

Next Sunday, I shall be attending the 100th birthday party of Corporal D'Arcy Jones, who will celebrate his birthday today week. On 8 November 1917, Corporal Jones took part in the last mounted cavalry charge to capture guns at a place called Huj near Beersheba. My father led that charge. The casualties were 50 per cent. and of the nine officers four were killed and two were wounded. I think that the father of my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) was either present or a member of the regiment at the time. It was a famous historic action during which 20,000 Turks took to their heels and fled down the hill. I know that the revolver of one of the officers who took part in that historic charge is in private ownership. It would be a great tragedy if, even though that weapon is kept in the greatest security, its firing pin had to be sawn off and a bolt put down the barrel, or whatever was required.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North will learn much more about firearms as the Bill progresses. One of the difficulties of deactivation is that previously nefarious individuals have de-deactivated weapons. In other words, firing pins have been restored and barrels drilled out, putting the weapons back in order. Deactivation is usually certificated by the proof house and it is a monumental destruction of the item. I am talking not just about historic pieces, but about works of art, which can be used. It would be a great tragedy if they had to be deactivated to the satisfaction of the proof house.

Mr. Henderson: I was referring to relatively modern guns, principally those manufactured in the 20th century. Older guns could be classified under the Firearms Act 1968 as antiques and so would not be covered by the Bill.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: With the right ammunition, unless it has been neglected, anything manufactured in the 20th century is likely to be a pretty useful piece of equipment to anyone who wishes to use it in that way. It is no good arguing against that. It is a fact of life that everyone accepts.

As far as I know, this matter has not upset chief constables or caused any difficulty. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will tell us if it has. The effect of deactivating guns is to destroy their commercial value. It also destroys the romantic, historic and emotional connection. I realise that there are those who cannot understand why anyone would feel that for a gun, but people do. As it stands, the law is completely satisfactory. The guns are held without permission for ammunition and without any intention to use them. The law already covers the point and I hope that my hon. Friend will reject the amendment.

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): How many guns are held under licence as trophies of war? Such information would give us some insight into whether a problem exists. Is it correct that a person with a certificate authorising the possession of such a weapon cannot use that weapon as a firearm? That would be an argument in favour of deactivating it.

I understand what the hon. Member for Weston–super–Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) has just said and the various reasons that he gave. However, we must consider the amendment seriously. It is correct and proper that there should be exceptions to a law. Nothing can be absolute. But we should always be circumspect in establishing such exceptions, because the more there are, the more difficult is the law to understand and the easier it is to circumvent it because there are more loopholes, bringing the law into disrepute. Therefore, we should try to restrict the exemptions.

We could not possibly disagree with the first three exemptions, but I am not so sure about the exemption for a trophy of war, unless it is deactivated. We need not consider the problems with deactivation that we debated yesterday, and temporary deactivation, allowing a gun to be put back together and used. We are now considering permanent deactivation. There must be methods of doing that that do not significantly damage the gun, other than making it impossible to use it again. Reactivating guns is a specialty, but that is another hurdle to be gone through before anyone can use such a weapon in a criminal act.

This is an area for concern and I would be grateful if the Minister would provide the information for which I have asked and consider the points that I have made.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): We understand that, in a number of instances, the attraction in retaining a trophy of war is the fact that, with the right information, one could shoot someone with it. The hon. Member for Weston–super–Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) said that people such as me who are not part of the gun fraternity would not understand that part of the attraction of having a trophy of war is to be able to fantasise about loading it, taking it out and shooting at something or other.

Sir Jerry Wiggin *indicated dissent.*

Mr. O'Neill: That was the point that the hon. Gentleman made, which he suggested we could not understand. Part of the attraction of a trophy of war is that, with the right ammunition, such a gun could be used. That is what the hon. Gentleman was saying and that was part of the argument that he advanced against deactivation.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I have known the hon. Gentleman a long time and I know that he has a fanciful imagination and turn of phrase, but I must refute what he says. What I said is on the record and he can read it. I said that a fine weapon is valued for its workmanship and, in this instance, for its history and its romantic attachment, whether that be the result of a gallant action, some war story in which it played a part, or whatever. That is what I said and it is on the record.

Mr. O'Neill: We may have to judge it on the record. I thought that I heard the hon. Gentleman say that my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North, (Mr. Henderson) not being a member of the gun fraternity, might not understand the attraction of a weapon and its lack of attraction if it was somehow artificially deactivated.

Is the Minister satisfied that such weapons will be held securely in the home of the licence holder? Let us not forget that a collector of armaments will probably be known within his area and could be a magnet to burglars, especially if it was understood that some of the weapons could, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North has already said, be used quickly.

What is important is not just whether such weapons should be deactivated or whether that is desirable or possible, but the conditions under which they are held by the appropriate people. I can well imagine that if anyone is to be entrusted with such weapons, their owners are the kind of people who should be, but what worries me is those in the community who see them as a potential for burglary and theft.

Mr. Dalyell: I do not want to be too much of a pedant, but anyone who acquired weapons before 1 January 1946 is likely to have done three score years and ten. Does the clause refer to weapons acquired by dad, grandad or great grandad? Perhaps some other wording should cover this.

I make no apology for returning to the issue of money. I am a little wiser than I was yesterday afternoon. I asked some questions in yesterday's debate, as a result of which a dealer got in touch with me and told me that many such weapons are enormously valuable. If they are surrendered at anything like market price, the figures involved could be many thousands of pounds.

For technical reasons and for reasons of history, some trophies of war are extremely expensive. If owners were unwilling to have them unlocked and debilitated in some way or another, they would presumably have to surrender them. If so, what compensation would be paid?

Sir Cranley Onslow (Woking): I should be grateful if the Minister would clarify the point raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). The clause refers to the acquisition of a trophy of war before a certain date. That implies that when the individual who acquired it has left this world, title passes away entirely, and is not inheritable under the terms of the Bill.

Miss Widdecombe: This has been an interesting debate. I have to say at the outset of my speech that, sadly, I must urge the House to resist the amendments if they are pressed.

Before I deal with the main part of the amendments and reply to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), I shall pick up various important points that were made in the debate. I am sure that, no matter what view one takes of the Bill, the House will want to congratulate Corporal D'Arcy Jones on his 100th birthday. We wish him a happy birthday and hope that it is a wonderful occasion.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Sir C. Onslow) raised an important point about inheritance. As the Bill is currently phrased, it does not provide for inheritance. However, we intend to table an amendment at a later stage, which will enable the heirs of people who have held trophies of war likewise to be exempt. As we propose to exempt both owners of trophies of war and their heirs, the issue of compensation does not arise. I hope that the hon. Members are reassured on that.

The hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) raised a relevant and important point. He is right that it is not merely the conditions in which such weapons are possessed that is important—I shall deal with that matter in a moment—but the security under which they are held. The police already have the power to specify the conditions under which a person is allowed to hold such guns. Clearly, an ancient weapon that is kept in a box in an attic by a widow does not cause the same concerns as a more modern weapon that is capable of being fired and is kept in more overt conditions in a house. The police can take account of particular circumstances and can specify conditions. They already have that power—we are not giving it to them in the Bill. I hope that that reassures the hon. Gentleman.

[Miss Widdecombe]

The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) asked several questions. In particular, he asked whether I could put a figure on the number of guns that we propose to exempt. The figures are not centrally collected, but they are known by individual police forces and can be obtained from them for a given area. As far as we are aware, no chief police officer has ever notified us of any problems involving such guns.

I regret that I cannot support the amendments for two reasons. First, deactivation is a red herring. For a gun to be classified as deactivated, extremely strict standards must be applied. It is not enough for bits and pieces to be temporarily removed: the gun must be permanently deactivated. A permanently deactivated gun is not caught by the firearms Acts, so would be irrelevant. A specification to exempt deactivated guns would be utterly redundant. It would have no meaning under the terms of the firearms Acts.

We do not want to introduce as a condition the requirement to disable. I say that, but it is already possible for the police to specify that dismantling or partial dismantling must occur as a condition of the gun being held. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North should consult the report of the debate on 12 November, in which my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) said that he has two world war one handguns, and that he keeps them dismantled at the police's request.

Under current legislation, the police are able to specify that a weapon must be dismantled. That often depends on the same issues that are raised when considering whether guns are being kept securely—how old the guns are, whether they are capable of being fired, who is keeping them and under what conditions and whether dismantling would be sensible. I believe that it is better to leave those matters to the police. If the amendments are pressed—I hope that they will not be—I urge the Committee to resist them.

5.15 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Before my hon. Friend finishes her speech, may I return to the subject of trophies of war? When she mentioned the concession that heirs will be allowed to keep such guns, everyone nodded and thought that it was a good idea. But if we thought about it, we would realise that it could lead to logically absurd situations. Presumably, I could keep my father's gun or my grandfather's. Could I keep my great uncle's gun? Could my great uncle will his gun to someone else? Why should people be allowed to keep trophies of war that have been left to them in a will, whereas other people will not be allowed to do so? If the Home Office makes concessions on what is an intrusive and confiscatory measure, it will soon get into deep water. That is the problem with this sort of legislation.

Miss Widdecombe: I could almost be forgiven for thinking that my hon. Friend was arguing against the concession. What I said was crystal clear: I said that the heirs would be exempt—not the sons, grandsons or great grandsons. A great nephew or a third cousin six times removed could be an heir. When we introduce our amendment, we will make our intentions clear. It is a trifle unfair for my hon. Friend to criticise the concession, as he does not yet have the details of it. I have given him an idea of my general thinking.

Mr. Dalyell: I shall be more than a trifle unfair, because I think that there are other problems with the magic date of 1946. What about trophies of the Korean war? To my certain knowledge, some of my national service contemporaries brought trophies back from the Korean war. God knows what has happened to them. Has the date of 1946 been plucked out of the air?

Miss Widdecombe: We must have a definition. When we introduce our amendment on trophies of war, hon. Members will have an opportunity to propose other amendments. There was a proposal to tighten the definition and to change the date to 1939. We shall carefully consider whether the definition is consistent with and coherent across different legislation, and whether it is right.

Mr. Dalyell: This is quite important. Presumably, certificates would have to be produced for possession of a gun acquired before 1946. What about trophies of war that were acquired back in the late 1940s and 1950s? We are going back a very long way. What standards of proof will be expected? I do not want to be difficult for the sake of being difficult, but I believe that the provision is fraught with difficulties.

Mr. Henderson: I did not really understand the Minister's point about deactivated guns. It is a bit like asking, "When is a gun not a gun?" It was suggested that a gun that was fully operational at one time could be in a different state as a trophy of war. We all acknowledge that a "trophy of war" licence would not be given for such a gun to be used with ammunition, but there is still a danger that it could fall into the wrong hands and then be loaded with ammunition. That is particularly likely in the case of the relatively modern guns that I mentioned earlier. I do not think that deactivating a gun of that kind means that it is no longer a gun: it could be reactivated.

Miss Widdecombe: No.

Mr. Henderson: I think that it could, but that is a technical point.

Miss Widdecombe: Perhaps I can give the hon. Gentleman some technical advice. As I said, deactivation is now extremely strictly prescribed. It would be much easier to build a gun from scratch than to try to reactivate a gun that had been deactivated according to current specifications. The meaning is pretty precise. In any event, deactivated guns fall outwith the terms of the Bill, and we would be talking about nothing if we wrote them in.

Mr. Henderson: I am grateful for the Minister's advice, but I am not sure that it convinces me. Common sense tells me that if something can be deactivated, it can be reactivated. Many engineers would welcome the challenge of reactivating a gun and returning it to the condition in which it was when it was manufactured and first in use.

I think that the Minister is saying that she agrees that there is a potential loophole—that she recognises that, in some circumstances, some trophies of war could become dangerous to the public. In recognising that, she has acknowledged that sometimes the police will have to say, "Your trophy of war must be kept in a particular circumstance before it can be given an appropriate licence." If the Minister recognises that, she should seriously consider saying it in the Bill.

Miss Widdecombe: Primary legislation already states that the police can specify the circumstances in which guns must be kept, either in terms of their physical condition—which means dismantling—or in terms of the secure conditions that surround their keeping. The decision is made on the merits of each case. There would be little point in trying to introduce blanket legislation affecting a number of circumstances to which the application was not appropriate.

Mr. Henderson: Again, I am grateful to the Minister for her advice, but this advice does not convince me either. There is a need to be specific. The Government must think again, and for that reason I may not press the amendment.

We should recall the position in which the police found themselves in central Scotland when they believed that, under the existing law, they would fail in court if Hamilton challenged their decision to deny him a certificate. We could be in the same position in this instance. Someone who held a trophy of war and believed that the law did not give the chief constable powers to be specific and to make a particular requirement could challenge the chief constable if he thought that the cost would be disproportionate.

Miss Widdecombe: Although this Bill does not make that specific, the existing law does. There would be no ground for such a challenge.

Mr. Henderson: I understand the point on which the Minister is attempting to convince the Committee, but she has not convinced me, and I am not sure that she has convinced the Committee. She has accepted that there is a loophole. I hope that, in the light of this discussion and the confusion that exists in the minds of hon. Members—*[Interruption.]* Some hon. Members are confused. The hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) looks very confused. We need clarification.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Minister find out from the Scottish Office precisely what the state of the law is? In 1988, Thomas Hamilton came to my surgery. His visit was prompted by a constituent, Mrs. Paula Morebay of Linlithgow, who telephoned to say that she was extremely concerned about her son being taken to a camp by a group leader whom she did not like and whom she distrusted. It was so urgent that I asked the police to go and see my constituent. Detective-Sergeant Anderson then went to see Hamilton.

The police reported that they would have liked to do something about the matter, but could not. That is the story that my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and others learned 10 years later, and it constitutes the guts of the issue. The man Hamilton came to my surgery and to my house. We would dearly have liked the police to do something about it, but they did not have the power—or thought that they did not.

Mr. Henderson: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's supportive emphasis of what I consider to be a real point. I hope that the Minister will accept that some Conservative Members are also confused, and, having reflected on the issues that we have discussed, will table an amendment. If she does not, it is possible that, after further consultation, I shall want to do so.

Miss Widdecombe: The minds of Conservative Members are models of clarity and lucidity. We are not confused. I cannot speak for Opposition Members, but I do not think that there is any confusion on Conservative Benches about the current provisions in the law. The hon. Member for Linlithgow did exhibit some confusion, but, to be fair, he had been absent for part of the discussion.

Mr. Dalyell: No, I had not.

Miss Widdecombe: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was at the other end of the Chamber.

Two pieces of law were discussed. The hon. Gentleman raised one: the conditions for licensing, which, as he well knows, we are tightening. The piece of law that I was discussing was that which allows the police to specify the circumstances in which a gun may be kept, in terms of either its physical state or the security provisions surrounding it. I do not think that I can say anything further to dispel the confusion, if indeed it exists.

I will, however, clarify a few points for the hon. Gentleman. I said that we would reflect on these. As all weapons taken in war since 1946 are deemed to be the property of Her Majesty's Government, the issue that the hon. Gentleman raised will probably not have as much impact as he may have thought; but I undertake to examine the position, and make certain that that is the case. He also mentioned guns that were purchased a long time ago, standards of proof and so forth. Certificates are renewed every five years, and the same tests are applied on each occasion.

Mr. Leigh: I wish to make just one point. It is clear in my mind now that the law is itself quite clear: anyone can be made an heir, and therefore anyone can sell any trophy of war to whoever he likes by signing a simple affidavit. The gun will then come on to the open market. Trophies of war will be kept on the open market, and will be specific items for sale and resale. *[Interruption.]* If that is not the case, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will correct me.

Miss Widdecombe: We are talking about wills and inheritance, not about deeds of gift. Wills are provable; wills are held; wills can be referred to.

[Miss Widdecombe]

Mr. Henderson: I think that there is now adequate evidence of confusion. I beg to ask leave to withdraw my amendment, to enable the whole House perhaps to return to the issue on another occasion.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New clause 3

SHOT PISTOLS

'. The authority of the Secretary of State is not required by virtue of subsection (1) (aba) of section 5 of the 1968 Act for a person to have in his possession or to purchase or acquire, or to sell or transfer, a shot pistol if he is authorised by a firearm certificate to have in his possession, or to purchase or acquire such a firearm subject to a condition limiting its use to the destruction of pests, vermin or rabbits.'.—*[Sir Jerry Wiggin.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I should say to my hon. Friend the Minister that, however long one studies these complex matters, it is extremely easy to become confused. I know that her clear mind will weave its way through the maze of legislation, but I fully sympathise with the confusion of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson). In the next week or two, he will learn a lot not only about the law, but about firearms. If any of the British Shooting Sports Council's experts could offer him assistance, I would be happy to make that available for two reasons: his amendments would be better and it would save everyone much time if they were clear.

Mr. Henderson: I assure the hon. Gentleman that his colleagues in the said body have already, on a very voluntary basis, given me a significant amount of briefing.

5.30 pm

Sir Jerry Wiggin: The important thing is to have the right advice and not all that is offered.

To return to the new clause, I confess to not having heard of a shot pistol until a few hours ago, but I understand a few hundred such weapons are kept usually for the destruction of pests in and around buildings, near pens and in confined spaces where longer and more powerful weapons might be dangerous. If the new clause were to be incorporated, I would not be opening some great door for criminal activity. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister might take a sympathetic view of this special class of vermin and rabbit-killing weapon.

Miss Widdecombe: I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Weston–super–Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) to withdraw the new clause. That does not mean that I reject it outright. It means merely that I appreciate and sympathise with what it is intended to achieve, but would welcome the opportunity to consider whether I can draw it more tightly and bring back a more restricted version later in the consideration of the Bill.

A shot pistol is a smooth-bore pistol usually using .410 cartridges and specifically designed, as my hon. Friend has correctly said, for vermin control inside barns and outbuildings. The relatively low power of small-shot cartridges minimises damage to the fabric of the building. It must be obvious, even to confused Committee members, that it is much easier to use something that scatters shot to a low power in a barn than a shotgun, which could blow away part of the barn as well as the animal. It should also be clear that, where there are many animals, something that scatters shot is better than having to take individual shots. Therefore, we need to consider seriously whether there should be an exemption for shot pistols.

I do not want to exempt all shot pistols from the prohibition in the blanket way that the new clause suggests. The purpose is reasonable. In some circumstances, a shot pistol is obviously the most humane and effective way and, if a good reason can be produced for possession of such a weapon, it can be left to the discretion of the chief officer of police to grant a firearms certificate for that purpose. Therefore, I am prepared to consider a tight exemption to the general prohibition for shot pistols. I want to consider further the best way of achieving that. On that basis, I hope that my hon. Friend will trust me to table a Government amendment, which he will be able to accept or to oppose in due course.

Mr. Henderson: There is something in what the hon. Member for Weston–super–Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) says. Clearly, there is a need for people in the country and perhaps even in the city to deal with vermin, but I hope that, when the Minister considers this, her proposal will be sufficiently tight to ensure that there is no abuse. One would not want this to be used as a back-door method of retaining Magnums. We all know—even I know—that if people tried to shoot a rabbit with a Magnum, there would be no rabbit left, but, for someone who was involved in target shooting with such a weapon, this would be one way of trying to ensure that he could retain it in future. I hope that the Minister will bear that in mind when she considers the matter.

Miss Widdecombe: I am happy to give that undertaking. It is precisely because I want to consider how tightly we can draw the new clause, while at the same time honouring the principle behind it, that I am inviting my hon. Friend the Member for Weston–super–Mare to withdraw it.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: A .410 will never be used for target shooting. It falls under the firearms requirements because of its length. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister, whom I can assure I always trust. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 5

EXEMPTION FOR COLLECTORS

'. The authority of the Secretary of State is not required by virtue of subsection (1) (aba) of section 5 of the 1968 Act for a person to have possession of any short firearm made before 1st January 1946 if he is authorised by a firearm certificate to hold that firearm as a collector's item and not for use, or if he is a registered firearms dealer.'.—*[Sir Jerry Wiggin.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Let me begin by explaining why I did not move new clause 4. The items in that clause fall better in the category of collectors' items and antiques. The sort of cartridges concerned, few of which still exist, are collectors' items. Few exist because, apparently, they used to go off in people's pocket.

Exemption for collectors is an extremely important part of the legislation. In his speech on Second Reading, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary conceded that a special case must be made for those items. I recognise that the precise phrasing of new clause 5 is unlikely to satisfy the Government and I do not intend to press it in its detail. It is a vehicle for an explanatory debate so that we can learn a little more about the Government's thinking before, I hope, my hon. Friend the Minister tables the appropriate new clauses to deal with the matter.

New clause 5 uses the approach of an amendment created in section 5 of the 1968 Act by the firearms regulations of 1992 in response to the European weapons directive, which says that, subject to important limitations

"the authority of the Secretary of State shall not be required by virtue of section 5 of this Act for any person to have in his possession, or to purchase, acquire, transfer, sell or transfer, any prohibited weapon or ammunition if he is authorised by a certificate under this Act to possess, purchase or acquire that weapon or ammunition subject to the condition that he does so only for the purpose of its being kept or exhibited as part of a collection."

New clause 5, however, is wider as it does not require the collector to have a section 5 or museum certificate.

New clause 5 is also wider in relation to the Home Secretary's suggestion, in particular with regard to pre-1919 guns of 9 mm calibre and handguns manufactured between 1919 and 1939. I shall not quote the Home Secretary in detail, but he made sympathetic noises, based on the fact that those fine weapons have been used, are treasured, loved and cosseted for their workmanship, value and collectability and are fine target guns. He concluded by saying:

"Under those proposals, pistols in the relevant categories would be subject to stringent restrictions. Their owners would have a choice. They could keep their guns securely at home on the condition that they were never fired,"—

I assume that no ammunition would be allowed either—

"or they could keep and fire them at the national shooting centre at Bisley."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. 186.]

The definitions of collectible weapons and of those that are exempted were dealt with in both the previous Acts. Firearms legislation is a terrible business, as we must constantly refer to the old Acts and the new Bill. Those hon. Members who will serve on the Standing Committee will need to have all those documents in front of them.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be sympathetic to our intentions, and can help. Bearing in mind the fact that the Home Secretary has already made a firm statement on the matter, it would be most helpful to those in the trade and the business to know the fine details.

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): I support the new clause. A number of people make the collection of antique guns a close hobby. Indeed, I have a constituent who does that. He collects the guns, but he has no intention of firing them. The guns are very valuable. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has already raised the question of costs. Selling the guns will be expensive, as some of them are very, very old.

I understand that the Home Office has received advice from Mr. Davis Penn of the Imperial War museum on what are and what are not antiques, so some formula is available. Even if the wording of the new clause is not exactly what my hon. Friend the Minister wants, I hope that she will take the point that we are trying to make and that the Home Secretary has already conceded. I hope that the sort of people I have described will have the opportunity to continue to pursue the honourable hobby of collecting antique guns.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Like my hon. Friends the Members for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) and for Weston–super–Mare (Sir J. Wiggin), I have been approached on the matter of gun collections, not least by the historic arms resource centre at Bisley camp. In addition, great concern has been expressed by those involved in the antiques and museum curators world. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider the matter carefully and that the Government will be prepared to table suitable amendments in Standing Committee. It is clear that a number of people are perfectly legitimately involved in the collection of what is, after all, part of our British heritage.

It is important that we all remember what the Bill is intended to achieve—in other words, what mischief it is intended to correct. I felt that I should find out a great deal more about the matter and I was fortunate enough to visit Bisley, as a guest of the National Rifle Association, last weekend—the day before the rally at which my right hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Sir C. Onslow) spoke, as many of us saw on national television news. While at Bisley, I saw the importance of its antique weapons collections.

It is important to remember that, if the mischief that the Bill is intended to prevent is the misuse of weapons, any exemptions that allow weapons to be kept when they are not being fired, or are being fired in controlled circumstances on the historic ranges at Bisley, might be acceptable and certainly would not go against the aim of the Bill.

5.45 pm

I understand from those involved in the historic arms resource centre that a large number of weapons are used in the National Rifle Association open competition—what is known as the Trafalgar meeting—in October. I am told that it is the de facto national championship. Of just under 1,900 event entries at the last Trafalgar meeting, more than 850 were for historic pistols. Only about 50 of those would be of .22 calibre. Therefore, a large inroad would be made into the use of historic weapons at that important meeting.

I do not want to take up any more of the time of the Committee, as my hon. Friend the Member for Weston–super–Mare said that he wanted this to be a short explanatory debate to determine whether the Government might be prepared to table suitable amendments at a later date. Therefore, in conclusion, I want to direct my hon. Friend the Minister's mind to the historic reconstructions undertaken by the English Civil War Society and the Sealed Knot, which are hugely important. I hope that that matter is being taken care of.

Miss Widdecombe: There was full discussion on muzzle loading yesterday, when I gave a clear

[Miss Widdecombe]

undertaking to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). He asked me whether the Sealed Knot could take it that it had nothing to worry about and I gave him a one-word answer—yes. I am delighted to put that on the record again today.

However, the new clause goes well beyond that matter. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Weston–super–Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) for saying that he will not press it because, without wishing to be too disagreeable, I have to say that it is not acceptable in its current form.

The firearms which the new clause is designed to exempt are not very old and for the most part are little different technically from modern handguns. Therefore, as currently drafted, it would be a major loophole in the proposed controls. However, I want to give my hon. Friends some reassurance. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has already said that we are considering actively and sympathetically how we might exempt historic handguns from the provisions of the Bill.

Historic handguns manufactured before 1919 and, in some cases, before 1939, which are not fired, will be able to be kept at home by owners on a firearms certificate. If we can agree with the police and the Bisley authorities the details of their proposals for the firing of historic handguns, to which my right hon. and learned Friend referred on 12 November, that will allow most owners of such guns to be able to keep them legitimately on a firearms certificate.

The details of our proposals are still under consideration. However, I fully accept that there is an historic angle to collections. If it is possible to make exemptions without producing the sort of loophole that the new clause sadly produces, we shall table an amendment at a later stage of the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Weston–super–Mare raised a point of law when he referred to the 1992 regulations. He was right to say that there are a number of Acts, all of which are interrelated and need to be referred to regularly in order to understand the current proposals. The 1992 regulations simply enacted requirements of the European Community weapons directive, which did not require the Government to make any particular impositions. The collectors provision does not apply to weapons that are prohibited under section 5(1).

Mr. Dalyell: Who will do the actual administrative work on all the exemptions? It is a major logistics exercise—and logistics exercises are extremely costly. In addition, in many cases involving old collections, a certain amount of expertise is required. Few people are in a position to speak with authority. It is all very well for us, sitting on green Benches, to say that this, that and the other will be done, but who will do it? Who has the knowledge to do it? Those who have are rather rare people.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. However, we already require the police to take decisions on the merits of individual cases. That will continue. Obviously, the guidance, provisions and details that will be introduced during the passage of the Bill will be based on the best expert advice that we can obtain. I am sure that it will be thoroughly tested by those who are giving technical advice to my hon. Friends and other hon. Members. With respect, I do not actually think that things will be quite as complex as he suggests once the definitions are made clear and transparent and the details brought forward. I would ask him to suspend judgment until that time. It is, of course, open to him at any time to ask what sort of advice any particular provision would entail and how it would be enacted.

Mr. O'Neill: Would the police be recompensed for the amount of work that might be entailed? One can envisage a constabulary having to have one or—perhaps—two resident experts and that the certification would involve a fair amount of administration. I get the impression at the moment that there is no suggestion of a charge being made for such a service. I fully accept the Minister's intentions in this area—she is trying to meet a legitimate concern—but please let us not have the chief constables coming to us to say that such a service will represent a disproportionate cost and that, therefore, other aspects of the police service will be put at a disadvantage, policemen will be taken off the beat, or whatever.

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman hypothesises about resident experts and all the rest of it. He has been in the House long enough to know that Ministers are most unlikely to commit resources to hypotheses.

Mr. Dalyell *rose—*

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I would like to be quite clear about whether the hon. Lady is giving way.

Miss Widdecombe: I wish to facilitate the hon. Member for Linlithgow.

Mr. Dalyell: I just wonder how many people at Maidstone police station know much about the matter.

Miss Widdecombe: I shall ask people at Maidstone police station exactly how they deal with the things with which they already have to deal under the current law. I am sure that the response will be: "Efficiently, without great drama and effectively."

Sir Cranley Onslow: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for her response to the amendment. I say to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) that a number of people in Surrey know a lot about rifles, pistols and handguns generally, and there should be no difficulty in obtaining expert advice from them. They are well skilled, extremely courteous and efficient in the way in which they have dealt with affairs involving shooting at Bisley over a number of years.

I declare an interest as a member of the council of the National Rifle Association. I am glad to hear that the words of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary are indeed to be carried through and that we can look forward to seeing the form in which the legislation will come before us. Although I did not have the advantage of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) of talking at length on the subject of historic arms when I was at Bisley on Sunday—it was pouring with rain and not an occasion for a lengthy

conversation in any case—I know that there is active interest in helping out with the question of the firing of historic weapons. Careful preparation is obviously needed to ensure that the physical security is adequate and that there is no hitch or glitch in bringing in the new system that my hon. Friend the Minister has promised that we shall see. I earnestly hope that she will press forward with her discussions with the Bisley experts and that the necessary steps will be taken in good time so that the due meeting can take place as scheduled.

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): I am grateful to the Minister for clarifying that she recognises the significance of the potential loophole, although I must admit some interesting images came to mind of members of Her Majesty's constabulary understudying at the "Antiques Roadshow" in seeking to identify some of the weapons. As my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) has pointed out, there is the whole question of whether charges would have to be made to have accredited experts evaluate guns, as hon. Members have recognised that such people exist.

Part of the debate has echoed some of the discussion on amendment No. 4, which related to trophies of war. This debate has expanded the recognition that some older weapons can be used in a lethal manner. No one is suggesting that people, for purposes of antiquity and collection, are operating in conditions other than those of common sense and good reason, but it is defined that collecting is a good reason for holding a firearm. If large-calibre shot firearms were exempted—even if they were manufactured quite some time ago—they could create quite a major loophole.

When the matter is being considered at a later stage, I ask the Government to take into account the fact that not all those who could have access to such weapons would be the people who should have legitimate access. There is always the danger of those who do not have common sense and the good of society at heart getting hold of such weapons—not least because the issue of ammunition is significant. As I understand, it is possible for the ammunition of other weapons to be used in antique weapons. What is more, those who have expertise in firearms are perfectly capable of manufacturing ammunition at home. If that were not so, institutions such as Bisley would not exist. It is therefore possible to rearm such weapons and create ammunition for them.

I do not think that we should glide over too easily the question of the administrative burden that would be created. We are conscious of the fact that Her Majesty's constabulary has rather a lot on its plate at the moment, and the Bill will rightly put a greater onus on the police. It is very important, therefore, that we do not put undue pressure on the police with regard not only to administration but to the raising of their levels of expertise in analysing such weapons and assessing whether they are liable to covered by the proposed Act.

Although I welcome the Minister's recognition of the possibility and danger of a loophole being created by the new clause, I ask her to take into account more seriously the points that have been made by my hon. Friends. We look forward to the Government tabling a more considered amendment at a later stage. At that point, I hope that we shall have a further opportunity for debate at quite some length.

Miss Widdecombe: I can assure the hon. Lady that, of course, we shall take cognisance of the need not to create a large loophole when we are considering the issue of historic weapons and what may or may not be classified under that heading. Indeed, it is for that reason that I have found the new clause too wide and insufficiently tightly drawn for me to accept.

Since the issue of administrative burdens and charges has been raised several times, perhaps it deserves rather closer consideration. First, we are talking about people who already have a firearms certificate. That is important to understand. Secondly, there is already a standard charge for a firearms certificate. As I understand, £56 is charged for the granting of a certificate and £46 for its renewal. Those charges are intended to cover police costs.

Mrs. Liddell: Could the Minister give us some advice? It was my understanding that no fee was charged for an old weapon. Can she confirm that there is no fee for a trophy firearm?

Miss Widdecombe: I may have to wait for my brain to catch up with me, but it does not have far to travel. I hope to be able to supply the necessary information to the hon. Lady before the debate is concluded. Meanwhile, that does not affect the stand that I have taken on the new clause.

Mr. Leigh: I wonder why it is morally acceptable—indeed, legal—to keep at home a lethal weapon simply because it was manufactured before a certain date, but immoral and against the law to keep a weapon at home because one wishes to indulge in a sport. I suspect that such a value judgment cannot be sustained.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): They are cherished.

Mr. Leigh: They are cherished or cosseted, but embarking on such a value judgment is dangerous for the House. One can usually tell a bad law by the number of exemptions attached to it.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: One or two matters have arisen that go rather wider than my new clause. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), as so often, put his finger firmly on an important point about the expertise and knowledge of firearms officers. One of the complaints that the British Shooting Sports Council has had for many years is that the firearms certificate system is not being used properly. Not only, sadly, was that demonstrably proved at Dunblane, but the 54—I think—constabularies all administer their own system on their own computers, which do not talk to each other.

Although things have got much better in the past few years—I give full credit to the Association of Chief Police Officers and its committee that deals with such matters—we were keen to have a national firearms board, staffed by ex-armourers, ex-police firearms officers and real experts, who would be long-term appointments, understand the shooting fraternity, be experts in firearms, know the law inside out and maintain a national computer

[Sir Jerry Wiggin]

network. If a firearm is found on a Friday night and the police wish to know whether it is a registered firearm, the chance of ascertaining that before midday on Monday is currently zilch.

6 pm

For some reason, which we have never discovered, there were those in the Home Office who decided that by commissioning certain studies they could come up with an astonishing cost for a national computer network. The figure of £10 million was mentioned, which I find astonishing bearing in mind the small numbers involved. I hope that, during the passage of the Bill, our idea might be given a further airing, because the way that we keep the register is inefficient.

I do not suggest that civilians should be permitted to give firearms certificates, but the very expertise that a civilian board would have would allow the oddball to be noticed because the people on it would deal every day with ordinary shooters.

Mr. Henderson: The hon. Gentleman knows a lot about the detail of firearms. One issue that has been raised in discussions with the police is that of the registration of firearms and we may come on to that subject in Standing Committee. Is the hon. Gentleman in favour of having a national firearms list on computer, because I understand that that does not exist at the moment?

Sir Jerry Wiggin: It certainly does not exist. Each firearms certificate identifies the weapon concerned with a serial number. Unfortunately, some weapons do not have serial numbers. There is always some problem, so it has been suggested that each item should have a log book, as cars do. I have never personally been against that suggestion, but it is not the policy of the British Shooting Sports Council because it would add to the complexity and paperwork. It is reasonable to expect that a national register should be kept or, at least, that the individual registers should be nationally accessible. That is within the capacity of modern technology. If one can run the national lottery and sell tens of millions of tickets every Saturday, 1.5 million certificates could easily be controlled by modern technology.

I have no brief for the way in which that is done today and I do not believe that the Home Office seriously considered our proposals. The studies were done in a most biased manner and I hope that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), during the passage of the Bill, will learn a little more about the subject and, perhaps, seek to persuade my hon. Friend the Minister of State of the merits of our solution, which would reduce costs and—just as important—improve the expertise.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State has made all the right noises, if I may put it like that, about the principle behind my new clause. Exempt weapons are exempt and do not require a certificate. There is no charge for exempt weapons, but the owner has to prove that they are exempt. If they are deactivated, some proof must be provided that they have been properly deactivated. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North was right to say that some clever people were undeactivating their weapons, but now more stringent standards have been drawn up under the masters of the proof houses. Weapons that have been deactivated under those standards will not only never work but are almost valueless, so many people do not wish to do that to their weapons.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 6

EXEMPTION FOR DEALERS

'. The authority of the Secretary of State is not required by virtue of subsection (1) (aba) of section 5 of the 1968 Act for a registered firearms dealer to have in his possession, or purchase or acquire, or sell or transfer, a short firearm for the purpose of selling or transferring that firearm to a person who may, by the provisions of this Act, lawfully possess, purchase or acquire it.'.—*[Sir Jerry Wiggin.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I recognise that new clause 6 is slightly controversial. Its effect would be to give dealers a general exemption to enable them to acquire short firearms for sale or transfer to an exempted person. They would draw their authority for that from the fact that the person with whom they were dealing was an exempted person under the legislation in respect of the gun in question. Since the market in exemptions will be so small, few dealers will apply for a section 5 licence, with all the difficulties that that will entail and the rigid parameters that will have to be followed for the occasional and probably not very profitable deal. Large geographical areas will therefore have no such service available.

The House will recognise that the Bill will ban mail order, so guns will have to be transferred from hand to hand. The new clause covers a small matter, but the role of licensed firearms dealers could be much more helpful than the Government have recognised. Dealers now have to have secure premises, with the latest alarms connected directly to local police stations. That is right, and they go to much trouble to establish those premises. They are experienced and trustworthy people. I would not say that it never happens, but I can remember only one occasion—apart from the obvious crooks—on which a firearms dealer has got into any trouble. If those people and their facilities are used, not only will expense be saved, but they will be able to replace some of the trade that they will lose.

Mr. Dalyell: The hon. Gentleman knows a lot about the subject. Can he tell the rest of us roughly how many licensed firearms dealers there are in Britain?

Sir Jerry Wiggin: The hon. Gentleman is very complimentary, but even after all these years I do not claim an encyclopedic knowledge. I believe that there are just over 3,000 registered firearms dealers in the United Kingdom.

I suspect that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will be suspicious of new clause 6—because the whole tone of the Bill is to suppress, eliminate and put out of business all handguns over .22—but I wish to try her on it. Although I do not intend to press it at this stage, I should be grateful for her full explanation.

Miss Widdecombe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for saying that he will not press the new clause as it would

be impossible for us to accept it. For a moment, so as to stay strictly in order under the new clause and so that I can give the Committee the information that I promised under the previous new clause, let us imagine that the dealer in question is trading in old weapons and he is asked whether there is a charge for a firearms certificate. The answer is that the only free certificates issued are issued for trophies of war—they are not issued for collectors' items or other historic weapons. I thank you, Dame Janet, for letting me get away with that.

I regret to have to tell my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) that we consider that the new clause would create a huge loophole in the general requirement for dealers to have the Home Secretary's authority to deal in prohibited weapons. We are not prepared to make concessions for dealers who deal in prohibited handguns. If dealers wish to sell prohibited weapons of any sort—including handguns which will be prohibited once the Bill becomes law—they must apply for the Home Secretary's authority to do so under section 5(1) of the Firearms Act 1968.

I accept the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare that this may cause inconvenience for people who will have to find a dealer with section 5 authority, but we are not aware that the current requirements cause problems for vets in respect of tranquillising weapons, for example. There are no exemptions to the requirement of section 5(1), nor do I propose to make any. Therefore, I have to say to my hon. Friend rather more firmly than previously that we cannot accept the new clause.

Mrs. Liddell: The Minister has the support of the Opposition in the stance that she has taken. The new clause would create a substantial loophole and would cause considerable difficulty by giving a blanket exemption to dealers. Those who will be able legitimately to hold higher-calibre weapons will be very small in number and there will be no real need for a wide network of dealers, which could only leave an opportunity for those with dishonourable purposes to gain access to premises where they knew such firearms could be held. I commend the Minister for the common sense of her position.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. About three-quarters of an hour ago, anticipating that the House of Commons was likely to rise on a Tuesday at an unprecedented early hour, I inquired about the possibility of a second Adjournment debate on the position of Brigadier Thompson's reconnaissance team, which is coming back from Zaire. The information that I received from the Table Office was that in all circumstances post-Jopling there is no possibility of a second Adjournment debate even when it is anticipated at a very early stage that the sitting could collapse.

The Adjournment debate of the hon. Gentleman from mid-Wales, the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis), could not possibly be extended from hospitals in mid-Wales to other matters. Given the pressure on parliamentary time, it is a crying shame and totally unsatisfactory that we should be about to begin the Adjournment debate at 12 minutes past 6. This is prime time, and many hon. Members have subjects on which they wish to raise questions—the commitment of the British Army in Zaire is just one. Can this matter be brought to the attention of the Procedure Committee because what it has done is, in effect, deeply unsatisfactory?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet-Fookes): The hon. Gentleman is correct in his understanding of the present practice. I would suggest that if he is unhappy he should go directly to the Procedure Committee to raise the issue. However, I must point out that, technically, we have not quite reached the Adjournment.

Bill reported, with amendments, pursuant to Order [18 November].

Bill, as amended, ordered to lie upon the Table.

Ordered,

That, during the proceedings on the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, Standing Committee E shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

Mr. Dalyell: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You have said that the current situation regarding a second Adjournment debate is "the present practice". Frankly, a lot of my colleagues did not know that. Is it "practice", which can be defied, or a resolution of the House which cannot?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I understand that the present situation is a result of the agreement following the Jopling reforms and that these are the orders under which we now work. I said "the present practice" because one cannot anticipate what changes might be made in the future.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I do not wish to detain the House, although my hon. Friend from Wales, the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis), could go on for some time with his Adjournment debate. I have considerable sympathy for the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). I remember the Jopling reforms, but I do not recall that such an eventuality as this was considered. Many people would argue that there should perhaps be a reserve list of Adjournment debates for just such an eventuality. I hope that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, will use your good offices to make that view clear, as the hon. Member for Linlithgow—as he so very often does—has put his finger on an important point.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I do not think that I can add to what I have said, but it is open to any hon. Member to make such recommendations as he feels suitable to the Procedure Committee, which exists for the purpose.

Mr. Dalyell: I do not want to put you on the spot, Madam Deputy Speaker, but could a statement be made at some point on precisely where the orders have been agreed that there should not be a second Adjournment debate? The Clerk may have some knowledge of this.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I will ensure that a member of the Clerk's Department provides chapter and verse for the hon. Gentleman.

Ceredigion and Mid-Wales Hospital Trust

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

6.15 pm

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I have been accorded a status this evening to which I would not dare aspire. I have been described as the hon. Member for mid-Wales, and even as the hon. Member for Wales. There may be a sense in which my party represents Wales, but I claim only to be the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North. However, what I have to say tonight applies and is relevant to a large part of mid-Wales.

I am grateful to the Under–Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), for being here tonight to respond to this important debate, and for the courteous hearing that he has given me in the past on this subject. I am also grateful to him for the letter that I received today in response to my most recent one to him—although it did not give me much comfort, except in one detail.

The Under-Secretary will know that I have been expressing concern about the future of the hospital service in my constituency since June 1995, in correspondence and in questions in the Chamber. He will also know that, all along, I have avoided alarmism in this discussion.

Those who attended the well-attended public meeting that I convened in Aberystwyth on 27 September—which led to the formation of the Ceredigion hospital services working group—will confirm that it would have been perfectly possible to create a mood of alarm, but that I avoided doing so. However, I must say that I am becoming alarmed at the direction of events and the likely consequences of the funding crisis—that is no overstatement—that is now affecting the Ceredigion and Mid-Wales hospital trust.

Before I come to discuss the crisis, can I first emphasise the excellence of the service provided by the trust? I wish to emphasise the district general hospital at Bronglais, Aberystwyth, and the three community hospitals at Aberaeron, Cardigan and Tregaron.

Bronglais provides a wide range of services, led by its own consultants, to a very high standard—of that there can be no doubt. The quality of service is matched by its efficiency, as its position in the NHS Wales performance tables on waiting times clearly shows. It has met its patients charter requirements successfully, and won the Healthy Hospitals competition in 1995. It is now preparing for King's Fund accreditation and the Investors in People award in 1996-97, and it has every confidence of success. It has set itself an impressive list of targets for the next financial year.

It is worth asking what lies behind that success. The trust's new chairperson, Eleri Ebenezer, who came to the job at the beginning of this financial year, identifies a number of factors in her foreword to last year's annual report. She says:

"Since my arrival in April 1996, I have been extremely impressed by the dedication and enthusiasm of the staff I have met so far."

Such things are often said, and they sound like clichés, but I think that there is truth in what is said about the hospital and the trust.

The foreword continues:

"the affection, support and esteem of the community for the Trust is excellent, with people having great pride in their local hospitals and health services . . . The trust also appreciates the strong support provided by the Community Health Council, the County Council, the University and the voluntary organisations in Ceredigion and Mid Wales."

The three community hospitals in turn are cherished by the localities they serve, by virtue of the same dedication and quality of care. However, the service, in terms of both quality and, crucially, range, is in danger.

Until a week or so ago, the Ceredigion and Mid-Wales trust, alone among the trusts in the Dyfed Powys health authority, had failed to agree a contract with it, arguing that the authority's offer was £400,000 short of what was needed. Knowing that, if conciliation found in the trust's favour, the authority would go to pendulum arbitration, which could result—that being the nature of such arbitration—in its getting nothing, the trust accepted an improvement of only £150,000 on the offer.

The additional sum of £150,000 that was agreed 10 days ago is in the form of a loan, and £320,000 of this year's health authority contract is what is known as brokerage—a loan that must be repaid. The implications of the settlement will be grave.

The health authority faces serious difficulties. It is responsible for, among other places, the constituency of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans), who is here today; I am sure that he is interested in the matter.

For various reasons, the health authority will have to find a total spending reduction of between £9 million and £10 million by the end of the decade; that is partly because Powys health authority, the predecessor authority, accumulated a deficit of, I believe, £2 million up to the end of last year. There is some feeling in the Dyfed part of the new authority that it should not have to carry the consequences of that deficit, but I do not want to be divisive and pursue that matter tonight.

Because of the need to pull back £9 million-plus, there will be year-on-year cuts until the end of the century, with little if any scope for efficiency savings to be made without reducing service quality. What I said about the efficiency level of Bronglais is relevant to that, and I emphasise that Bronglais has among the lowest management costs in Wales. It is small wonder that the health authority says:

"the situation could lead to Trusts failing and services being put in jeopardy."

Within that dismal picture, Bronglais district general hospital—I want that term to mean what it says—as a small hospital, serving a sparsely populated rural area, has its own specific problems, operating as it must in the competitive environment of the national health service market. Specifically, it is required to service any capital development to the extent of 6 per cent. and to provide a 6 per cent. return not only on new capital development but on asset value.

Unless there is a recognition of those specific problems—there should and can be such a recognition—and unless provision is made, as it must be, to cope with them, Bronglais will find it increasingly difficult to maintain a sufficient capital programme to replace equipment and keep abreast of new developments in technology and other facilities. The effect on staff

recruitment and the marketability—we have to use that terminology—of the hospital's services could be to set up a spiral of decline. I have described to the Minister in the past how that could occur.

The strategy document of Ceredigion and Mid-Wales trust, "Ceredigion 2000", contains a SWOT—strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats—analysis. Among the threats, it identifies the fact that fundholders now have far greater discretion in purchasing decisions and that they—and especially those at the outer periphery of the area—might be tempted to purchase services elsewhere.

On capital development, lest anyone should mention the private finance initiative, let me express my total scepticism as to its relevance to the health service in general and to a small hospital in rural Wales in particular.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Is my hon. Friend aware of the way in which the PFI has been used to hold back for months, if not years, the work that should be taking place on the new community hospital in the neighbouring area of north Meirionnydd and eastern Dwyfor? That is a warning to anybody who goes down that road.

Mr. Dafis: I am aware that the attempt to find a PFI solution involves delay. The new development at Bronglais is extremely welcome, and can go ahead only because it is revenue neutral. It is the last capital development to get under the fence before PFI came in, and I doubt whether it would be proceeding if PFI had been in place earlier.

In attempting to protect the district general hospital at Bronglais, the trust will inevitably be tempted—this is the crunch for the moment—to close community hospitals, despite its intention, stated in February 1994,

"to strengthen the role of community hospitals"

as part of its community services strategy. If it closed a community hospital, it would immediately save the 6 per cent. charge that it has to make on the asset value of that hospital.

I remind the House of the various statements, including one by the former Secretary of State for Wales, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), that community hospitals are valued and are to be retained, and that their closure should not be on the agenda. On that subject, the health authority said in one of its documents:

"there has to be rationalisation"—

a euphemism for closure, of course—

"of some peripheral hospitals if we are to manage within the current base budget."

Any such move would provoke a fierce and entirely justified public response. The Cardis, together with the people of north Pembrokeshire, who use the hospital at Cardigan, would rise in revolt, and that would be a fearsome spectacle.

The health authority is responding to the crisis by initiating a strategic review of its services. There is nothing wrong with that, and certainly there is nothing wrong with considering ways of increasing co-operation between trusts and hospitals. I am all in favour of that at the expense of the competition principle that underpins so much of Government policy. However, we must resist any cost-cutting exercise that would reduce the range of specialist services provided by Bronglais's specialists.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I congratulate my hon. Friend on obtaining this important debate, and acknowledge the hard work he has done to protect the services in Ceredigion and Pembroke, North. On Bronglais hospital, many of my constituents in the south of Meirionnydd have to travel to Aberystwyth for essential health services. Is he aware of the great difficulties they would face if they had to travel to places such as Carmarthen? The distances involved are unreasonable. Bronglais serves south Meirionnydd as much as Ceredigion and Pembroke. I hope that the Minister will respond usefully and reasonably.

Mr. Dafis: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that important point. I am talking not only of the welfare of Ceredigion but of a necessary and highly valued service to many people in Machynlleth and parts of Meirionnydd and Montgomeryshire. It is essential for that large area that the hospital should be kept as it is.

Trust chairman Eleri Ebenezer, speaking of the great pride in their hospital of people in the trust area, said:

"They particularly appreciate that they do not have to travel over fifty miles to the nearest of our neighbouring Trusts' General Hospitals for treatment and care."

The nearest general hospital is in Carmarthen, and there is also ysbyty Gwynedd and, to the east, Shrewsbury. It would be unacceptable and unreasonable for people to have to travel to those. She continues:

"As a small trust, the strategic importance of our location cannot be denied."

Aberystwyth, in its strategic location, serves a wide area of mid-Wales. That is the bottom line. The position of Bronglais as a district general hospital delivering at least its present range of consultant-led services with its own consultants must be protected. Bearing it in mind that it serves the biggest part of mid-Wales, anything else is unthinkable. That should be non-negotiable.

It is worrying that the health authority suggests that the trend towards increasing specialisation, and the ever more rigorous requirements of the royal colleges in respect of the number of treatments that need to be undertaken and on the number of consultants who have to work together, must imply increasing centralisation of services. I am unhappy about such talk. That assumption must be challenged. Centralisation is not the way forward.

In dealing with Bronglais, the royal colleges have shown a sensible and accommodating flexibility in the numbers game—which I dare say makes some sense in an urban setting—and they must continue to do so. It would not be acceptable to apply urban norms to vastly different rural settings.

I remind the Minister and others that the Government's recent White Paper, "A Service with Ambitions", gave as one of the five elements of quality

"the accessibility of the service, in terms of distance, time, physical access, language and understanding".

Almost all those factors, and especially language and understanding, apply importantly to the position of Bronglais. It should not be part of the agenda of a service with ambitions to centralise away specialisms from places such as Aberystwyth in the way it has.

Cancer care at Bronglais is a case in point. A highly regarded and valued service is provided, working in association with Singleton hospital at Swansea and the Royal Marsden hospital. That service is seeking designation as a unit as one of its targets for next year. It

[Mr. Dafis]

should achieve that. It would be unacceptable for the people of mid-Wales to have to receive that care at a distant hospital.

There is talk of restructuring the trusts in the health authority. Of course, there can be no question of the Ceredigion and Mid-Wales trust being swallowed by another trust. Any restructuring should bear in mind the need and potential for strengthening the trust. There may be an opportunity for that, with the proposals for the Derwen mental health trust. Proposals were put out for consultation last week, and they must be considered in the context of the need to strengthen the Ceredigion and Mid-Wales trust.

All that I have said must mean, setting aside other considerations, that the Ceredigion and Mid-Wales trust needs more money. It is as simple as that. That issue cannot be ducked for next financial year; I presume that it is too late for this financial year. The problem must be addressed in the context of the needs of Dyfed Powys health authority, which serves a vast area in Welsh terms. It serves 470,000 people and must, of necessity, maintain four district general hospitals even though in simple population terms two would serve. The nature of the area demands that; it is acknowledged that four are needed.

It is unreasonable for the health authority to have to work with a diminishing budget for the next four years. How can it possibly manage in such circumstances? The formula is, of course, being reconsidered. I do not want to argue that one health authority should take money away from others, but Dyfed Powys health authority needs more money. The special conditions and circumstances that operate there must be acknowledged in the funding provided, and especially in respect of that for the trust serving Ceredigion and mid-Wales.

The decisions that will be taken over the next few weeks, first in the Budget and then in the Welsh Office financial settlement, are highly relevant. For that reason, I beg the Secretary of State for Wales, with all due courtesy, to pay careful and urgent attention to my remarks. The matter is crucial. I assume that the health authority is making, and has made, strenuous representations to the Welsh Office about the situation. I hope that it will not simply agree to implement the cuts. Its function should in part be to demand and argue for the additional funding that it certainly needs.

We are told that the NHS is everywhere under strain, but I speak for my patch and for a large part of rural Wales. Unless this crisis is tackled—and I do not exaggerate—the implications for this strategically vital institution and the people it serves will be very serious.

6.38 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) for giving us an opportunity to debate this important subject. I well know his concern for the Ceredigion and Mid-Wales NHS trust and for Bronglais hospital in particular. In turn, as he acknowledged, Bronglais hospital achieves excellence and if there were to be a deterioration in that, my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans), some of whose constituents are served by the same hospital and trust, would be even quicker to my door than the hon. Gentleman has been.

I must also thank the hon. Gentleman for not pursuing the opportunity to raise the subject last Friday, as that would have precluded me from representing the United Kingdom at an important European conference in Ireland on employment and regional development. I am grateful to him for that. It was not the first time that Plaid Cymru has kindly facilitated the representation of Wales abroad, and that is always appreciated.

Although the funding of the Ceredigion and Mid-Wales NHS trust is the hon. Gentleman's prime concern, before I focus on the trust and Bronglais hospital, it may be desirable for me to outline to the House the present arrangements for hospital income and the role that the Welsh Office has in the matter.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales stated earlier this month at the Welsh Association of Health Authorities and Trusts conference, the NHS budget in Wales increased last year from £2.2 billion to £2.3 billion. Since 1979, the average annual increase in the NHS budget has been well above inflation. Furthermore, it is on record that the NHS will receive an increase over and above the level of inflation every year for the next five years. My right hon. Friend has agreed to match that in Wales. The health service in Wales is and will continue to be a priority.

The overall thrust of my right hon. Friend's message, however, is that there will be no relief from improving efficiency, management, communication with the public and standards. It cannot be accepted that a health service spending £2.3 billion a year cannot find more savings in addition to those already achieved.

I remind the hon. Gentleman that the large figures that he bandies around are fanciful and have no connection with reality. My right hon. Friend will be announcing the details of his Welsh spending plans next month.

NHS trusts, by their very nature, control their own affairs, and receive no direct revenue funding from the Welsh Office. They receive by far the greatest share of their total income from contracts with health authorities and general practitioners for the provision of health care. A small proportion of income derives from non-patient-related activities, such as the funding of medical training and income generation schemes.

In the case of the Ceredigion and Mid-Wales NHS trust, 94 per cent. of its income derives from patient activity, with the remaining 6 per cent. coming from other sources. Dyfed Powys health authority provides the largest element of contract income, although the success of the fundholding scheme means that an increasing proportion of patient activity is commissioned directly from general practitioners. That is a welcome development, and there are already well-documented benefits for patients throughout Wales.

Capital expenditure by an NHS trust—to expand, replace or develop some of its capital assets—can be funded from four main sources. First, a NHS trust can fund from its own depreciation reserves. Those reserves occur as an element of depreciation is included in contract prices for patient activity and is utilised to offset the cost of replacement assets. Secondly, when revenue surpluses are generated, there is the flexibility to use those surpluses to finance capital expenditure.

The Welsh Office provides a third source, via long-term loans to finance authorised capital expenditure which cannot be met by the means already described. That would involve the inclusion of interest costs of the loans in prices for patient activity.

Finally, capital expenditure can be generated via the private finance initiative, which is by far the most exciting and innovative method of capital provision. Increasingly, hospitals are making use of the private finance initiative as a means of acquiring improved capabilities without the need for capital expenditure. The private finance initiative also offers the opportunity for more innovative means of health care provision, with commensurate increases in efficiency and effectiveness.

I am sure that the House will agree that the private finance initiative represents a major new opportunity for the NHS in Wales to explore and exploit the most modern and effective methods of health care provision. Frankly, I am amazed by the hon. Gentleman's scepticism, and I completely refute the assertion by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley).

In no way does the PFI represent a means of engineering delay. It has quite the opposite effect, for it expands the ability to undertake large capital projects and means that more such projects will proceed earlier than they would have done by traditional and conventional methods. Indeed, the chairman of Powys Healthcare NHS trust told me that prospective partners had shown more interest in the private finance initiative projects at Newtown Bronllys than in most other PFI candidates to date, so the claims that PFI has no relevance or interest in rural areas are clearly misplaced.

Let me turn to what is expected from a hospital in terms of its financial performance. Naturally, it should balance its books year on year. What is required, in effect, is that the hospital's revenue expenditure should be contained within the income that it can expect to receive, essentially from its health authorities and GP fundholders and from other means. The target is well understood, and all but a handful of hospitals in Wales have achieved that break-even position.

I am sure that it has not escaped Members' notice that the financial performance of the NHS in Wales has lately been the subject of media scrutiny that is all too often inaccurate and misleading. Particularly, I refer to the flawed report produced by the University of Wales college, Newport, on behalf of the BBC. It contains a large number of inaccuracies, and has caused great concern among patients and staff at hospitals in Wales, that are unfairly reported as being in deficit at the end of the last financial year.

Contrary to the report, overall hospital financial performance in Wales in 1995-96 was represented by a surplus of £2.61 million. The report wrongly incorporates technical accounting adjustments, which have no detrimental effect on the trusts' finances, into the overall picture. That error could have been corrected easily if those involved had taken the trouble to check the figures with Welsh Office or hospital officials or read the annual reports of the hospitals that were criticised in such a sensational and unfair way. The media could easily have given the true picture had they the will to do so.

Ceredigion and Mid-Wales NHS trust has broadly satisfied its requirement to break even over the past three financial years. It is anticipated that this year's financial performance will be much the same. I recognise that this is a difficult year for Bronglais hospital, and the effort that is being made is a reflection of the continuing commitment and hard work of all the staff involved.

Furthermore, I am pleased to confirm what the hon. Gentleman said—that the Ceredigion and Mid-Wales NHS trust performs above the Welsh average for most of the patients charter targets. The number of patients treated in 1995-96 continues to increase, with the largest increase of 26 per cent. being in day cases. That is in line with Welsh Office targets. Staff at the trust are to be commended for the high-quality care that they provide for the people of mid-Wales.

I am aware that the hon. Gentleman has particular concerns about the funding of the hospital together with its long-term viability. As I said, I met him last month to discuss those very issues. It was a very informative and productive meeting, during which we discussed various points of concern regarding the Ceredigion and Mid-Wales NHS trust, Bronglais hospital and the hon. Member's request for additional funding to the health authority to be earmarked for the hospital.

On the question of additional funding to Dyfed Powys health authority specifically for Bronglais hospital, I can only reiterate to the hon. Gentleman that it would not be appropriate, because, as I have stated on a number of occasions, it is for the health authority to judge where the resources allocated to it for the health care needs of the local population should be spent.

Additional funding could be provided only at the expense of other parts of Wales. I am sure the House will recognise that that would compromise our commitment to equity of health care provision across Wales.

I do, however, acknowledge that Dyfed Powys health authority is facing a challenging period in terms of its finances, and in order to help the authority I have agreed loans totalling £2.5 million. That sum is made up of a previous loan of £800,000 from 1995-96 that was made to the former Powys health authority, together with a further £1.7 million being provided this year.

I have also agreed that the repayment of those loans should be deferred to the year 1999-2000. That will allow the health authority to establish firmly a comprehensive strategy for commissioning health care before repaying the loans. In agreeing those arrangements, I have requested regular monitoring reports from the Dyfed Powys health authority.

As I am sure the hon. Gentleman will know, Dyfed Powys health authority has undertaken a review, with the assistance of all the NHS trusts in the health authority's geographical area, and I readily commend that initiative. It provides an opportunity to identify more efficient use of resources and it is expected that a list of recommendations will be submitted to the Welsh Office some time in December.

Mr. Dafis: The Minister tells us that it is for the health authority to allocate resources, and I understand that. Surely, however, the Welsh Office has a view on the specific need for the district general hospital at Bronglais to retain the range of services that it currently provides through its own specialists. In addition, surely the Welsh Office has a view—as I am sure the Government do—on the position of community hospitals. Would not the Minister regard it as unacceptable if the trust had to

[Mr. Dafis]

choose between those two priorities—the retention of community hospitals or the protection of the range of services available at Bronglais?

Mr. Jones: First and foremost, I say to the hon. Gentleman—as I have told him before—that we remain and will continue to remain committed to the provision of acute health care at Bronglais hospital. It is not, however, possible for me or anyone else in my position to attempt to second-guess all the decisions in the decision-making process that should occur within the health service in Wales.

There has to be a proper place for health authorities, which have now been reformed and rationalised, with great economies achieved by cutting the number of bureaucrats in the Welsh health authorities. It is their responsibility to identify the health needs of the communities in their local areas. They in turn make arrangements with NHS trusts up and down Wales to provide all that health care.

I am confident that that is the right level on which decisions should be made, are made, and will continue to be made. Dare I describe it to the hon. Gentleman as a process of real devolution, which we have brought about in the NHS in Wales and in many other fields of activity in Wales? Real devolution is a guiding principle of this Government—we believe in it, and we practise it.

Together with the health authority and Bronglais hospital, the Government will maintain their commitment to providing modern hospital health care for the people of Ceredigion. I can continue by saying to the hon. Gentleman that one obvious example of that commitment is the approval and funding of the reprovision of facilities for the elderly and mentally ill from North Road hospital, which is an inadequate and antiquated location, to a purpose-built facility at Bronglais hospital. The new scheme will include in-patient and day hospital facilities, together with associated X-ray and urodynamic services. That scheme is progressing as planned, at a projected cost of some £8.4 million—a significant commitment indeed.

In addition, Bronglais hospital has been allocated a further £900,000 capital expenditure in 1996-97 for the provision of improved pathology services and other equipment needs. The trust's commitment to the latest technology is demonstrated through its key involvement in the Telemedicine project, which received widespread publicity at national level. The trust also became the first in Wales and the second in the United Kingdom to go live on the Internet in 1995.

It is appropriate to remember at this point that this month we witnessed the 50th anniversary of Parliament passing the legislation to set up the national health service. It is a tribute to the many thousands of doctors, nurses and staff who have healed the sick and cared for so many of our fellow citizens over the years that our health service is regarded with such affection today.

When the legislation passed into law, my party gave the national health service its full support, and that support has continued ever since—indeed, for 34 of the 48 years of the life of the NHS since 1948, it has been Conservative Governments who have raised the taxes and given the money to keep the NHS running as a universal, national service that is freely available to all.

Spending on the national health service in Wales has increased by nearly 85 per cent. since the winter of 1979, when the Labour party was last in power. We have increased the resources available to the NHS by record amounts. There are more nurses, midwives, doctors and dentists than in 1979. We are proud of the expanded and improved NHS that we enjoy today. This Government have presided over the biggest hospital building programme in the history of the health service. In Wales, we spend more on the health service for every man, woman and child than is spent in England, particularly for areas with more marked health needs.

Our improvements have allowed us to continue to expand the NHS in Wales. New hospitals are coming for St. David's and the Royal infirmary in Cardiff, Baglan, Bronllys, Newtown and Ynys y Plwm near Llantrisant, and there will be a new cancer centre in north Wales.

On its 50th birthday, we can look back with pride at a health service that works. It works because it has adapted, while remaining true to its founding principles. It works because it has a Conservative Government who are committed to real increases in health spending.

This Government have continued to demonstrate their commitment to the development of a health care system in Wales that not only meets the needs of today but is designed to take the service well into the next millennium. That can be truly effective only if all the component parts of the NHS in Wales work together with a strategic view of the way ahead.

It cannot be denied that health care provision in Ceredigion and mid-Wales faces particular pressures, but I have every confidence that Dyfed Powys health authority and local GPs will want to ensure that their local hospital is used for the best and fullest benefit of the population in that rural area. That is exactly in line with the extract from the trust chairman's report describing the way in which the community regards both Bronglais hospital and the trust, which the hon. Gentleman quoted with great pride. Working together, they will see the way forward as one of co-ordination and co-operation for fulfilling the accepted objective of always striving to provide the people of Ceredigion with the best possible quality of health care.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 20 November 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Firework Safety

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

9.34 am

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this issue. It is only two weeks since the headlines were full of news about firework-related tragedies. On 28 October, a 10-year-old boy, Dale Mitchell from Nottingham, died through the illegal misuse of fireworks. On 1 November, David Hattersley, a head teacher from High Wycombe, was fatally injured during his school's firework display. On 2 November, Stephen Timcke, a City trader from Kent, was killed in front of his two young sons, aged five and seven, at a private bonfire party.

The headlines may have gone, but the consequences of those tragedies live on for the families and friends of those who died, as they do for all those injured by fireworks. That is why the House is under an obligation not to wait for the next tragedy and the next headline, whether it comes next month or next year at bonfire night, but to take action now to improve firework safety.

I secured an Adjournment debate on the same subject in November last year, when I raised questions about the sale of fireworks to the under-16s and the importing of dangerous fireworks. The sale of fireworks to the under-16s is still an issue. In 1995, 825 of the 1,500 firework-related injuries affected the under-16s. We still need to take more effective action to ensure that children are not able to buy fireworks and that a responsible adult is in charge wherever fireworks are used. The Government's zeal for deregulation has not helped us to achieve that, but that is not the issue that I want to spend time on today.

I want to consider firework imports in depth. Last year, I told the House that shipments of Chinese fireworks containing illegal substances had been allowed on to the market in the United Kingdom. Only in October this year, more than a year after authorisation was first given for those fireworks, were the last container loads tracked down. They had been on the market in this country throughout that time.

The Government had unnecessarily scrapped import licences for fireworks in 1993. The Health and Safety Executive's actions in authorising firework imports at the time of last year's debate left a good deal to be desired. Since that debate, its performance in scrutinising import applications has improved considerably, but the procedures are not in place to check that the products for which importers apply and receive authorisation are the same as the products that come into the country and find their way on to the market, and to ensure that those products are properly labelled.

Example after example can be quoted. There was a raid only yesterday—as prosecution is pending, it would be inappropriate to say where it happened—involving a 40 ft container of fireworks that had found its way into a lock-up garage in this country. We must wait to see how that prosecution turns out, but we must ask why nobody knew that that container had come into the country and why it was checked on only once it had found its way to the lock-up garage. Why did we not know? Why did the authorities not know in advance?

Perhaps an even more tragic example is that of Stephen Timcke. He was killed by a mortar shell, which was probably not meant to be on general sale in this country. It was imported from China and all the instructions were in Chinese. He died at a private bonfire party, in front of his two sons. All sorts of questions are raised. Who sold Mr. Timcke the firework? How did the vendor get hold of it? How did it get into the country and—perhaps even more chilling—how many of those fireworks are still in circulation and in the shops to this day?

Investigations are continuing and it is right that they should, but it is on that matter that I seek my first assurance from the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs and the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford). Will he and his hon. Friend assure me that the Health and Safety Executive will not grant authorisation unless arrangements are in place to ensure that each consignment of imported fireworks is logged at the port of entry, transported directly from the port—sealed—to secure storage at a recognised site and routinely tested before it goes on the market? Unless that is done, authorisation is fine, but there is no way of checking whether what has been authorised is what finds its way into this country and on to the market. The results are tragic and only too plainly seen in the death of Stephen Timcke. It is within the Minister's power to do something about that and I ask for that assurance.

Secondly, on categorisation of the different sorts of fireworks, the Minister began a review of firework safety regulations in March and I welcome his initiative, which was useful. When he takes into account the responses to that review, I hope that he will consider removing bangers from general sale. I met him a couple of weeks ago to discuss that. With 316 injuries last year alone, more accidents involve bangers than any other type of firework. They are easy to abuse, have no visual appeal, are a nuisance to people and frighten animals. They should be taken off the market. I strongly urge the Minister to agree that course when he considers the results of the review.

Some measures cannot wait until the review is completed and the results known. Stephen Timcke was killed by a mortar shell, as was David Hattersley, the head teacher from High Wycombe. The signs are that Mr. Hattersley acquired the shell lawfully. It was probably a category 3 firework, for use in large outdoor spaces. Mortar shells are freely on sale. What are they? I can reassure you, Madam Speaker, that the one I have here is a dummy and there is no danger to the House. It is a dummy of a 4 in mortar shell. It looks like a lethal weapon and we know that, in the cases of Stephen Timcke and David Hattersley, that is precisely what it was.

[Mr. Richard Burden]

Mr. Hattersley suffered the most appalling facial injuries when the mortar shell exploded in his face—injuries from which he died without regaining consciousness the following day. Such a firework has no place on general sale in this country. It has no place on sale now—we cannot wait until after the review, until next year, or next bonfire night. I do not want to see any more tragedies such as were suffered by Stephen Timcke or David Hattersley, and they were not the first, as someone in Yorkshire was killed by a mortar shell two years ago.

Under the Consumer Protection Act 1987, the Secretary of State has the power to ban by order, for a maximum of 12 months, the supply of anything that is considered unsafe to the general public. He does not have to wait for consultation or for the review. I imagine that 12 months will be long enough for the Minister to complete his review and to consider all the other matters, and long enough for changes to be introduced—either by this Government or by the next Labour Government. Will the Minister assure me that he will not allow lethal items of equipment such as mortar shells to remain on general sale, so that we can be confident that there will be no more accidents, no more Stephen Timckes and no more David Hattersleys, while the review is taking place? The public demand action, and I hope that the Minister will assure me that he will take the action that it is in his power to take, to remove such shells from public sale.

Thirdly, we should consider training, in particular the training of those who use powerful category 3 fireworks, such as the one that I have here, which are on sale to the general public but which should not be, or category 4 fireworks—the category that I should like such fireworks to be put into. Those are fireworks that are not meant to be on general sale to the public, but which are meant for use in displays. According to British standards, category 4 fireworks are not meant to be on sale to the general public, but no clear regulations are in place to specify who is allowed to buy or use them. There are no real restrictions on their purchase or operation. As a result, someone without any formal training can buy and use category 4 fireworks, setting him or herself up to run a public display. Surely that has to end.

My third request to the Minister—again, it is entirely within his power to agree—is that he should establish straight away a national training scheme for those running firework displays and using category 4 fireworks. Will he ensure that no one can run such a display without appropriate and recognised training? For that measure to be effective, we need to control the places through which category 4 fireworks are distributed. Will the Minister ensure that they are on sale only from licensed premises, so that we can see where they come in, where they are stored, who is entitled to sell them, to whom they are sold and who is allowed to operate them?

The Minister might say that that is complicated and difficult to do, but it is not. A model for exactly the sort of scheme that I am describing exists in Canada. Support for such a mandatory scheme comes from a wide range of organisations: trading standards officers and departments have voiced their support, as has the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, the Consumers Association and the National Campaign for Firework Safety, to name but a few. Responsible members of the fireworks industry have also voiced their support for such a scheme, because they know that it is not in their interests for public safety to be put at risk and for people, who frankly do not have the skills, to buy and use powerful category 4 fireworks. That situation reflects badly on the industry, and responsible members of the industry want it to end.

The Fire Service College has said that it has the skills and is willing to run a training scheme. It only remains for the Minister to give the go-ahead. Will he introduce a requirement for such training and for the licensing of retailers of category 4 fireworks, so that we can be sure that items of equipment such as the mortar shell that I am holding are not used by unskilled or untrained people?

I met the Minister the week before bonfire night, to discuss the Department of Trade and Industry's firework safety publicity campaign, to raise again some of the matters that I raised in my Adjournment debate last November, and to consider the review that he is undertaking and some of the issues arising from it. He received me with the utmost courtesy, as he always does, and I believe that he has the best intentions on firework safety, but we need more than good intentions and reviews: we need action to back those up and prevent further tragedies.

First, will the Minister and the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, who is also involved through the Health and Safety Executive, tighten controls on the importation of dangerous fireworks? That can be done only by checking at the port of entry, transporting the fireworks directly to secure storage and routinely testing them before they reach the market.

Secondly, will the Minister put a temporary prohibition order on sale to the public of mortar shells and similar powerful fireworks that, by any standard, should be in category 4, while the review is undertaken, so that we can be sure that the public are safe in the meantime?

Thirdly, will the Minister establish a national training scheme for anyone who wants to run displays and operate category 4 fireworks, and ensure that those more powerful fireworks are available only through licensed premises? If he is prepared to do that, I am sure that he will have the support of all Opposition Members.

For goodness' sake, let us not wait until the next bonfire night, witness more tragedy and injuries, and ask ourselves why we did not act when we had the chance. Let the memory of David Hattersley and Stephen Timcke be our spur to taking the actions that are necessary to ensure that the public are able to enjoy fireworks in safety and that we avoid any more tragedies of the kind that we have witnessed this year.

9.52 am

Mr. Chris Davies (Littleborough and Saddleworth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) on securing this debate. To my knowledge, this is the second time that he has initiated a debate on the subject. The previous one was on 1 November 1995, and perhaps it is appropriate that this one takes place after 5 November, because there may be a tendency for views to be heightened and emotional when constituents are expressing concern in the run-up to bonfire night and for the emotion to fade away in the aftermath. So we are more able to consider matters rationally and seriously in the cold light of late November.

The time is appropriate also because the Government's consultation paper is still on the stocks. The closing date for submissions was 16 October, but I hope that the Department of Trade and Industry will take into account the points made in this debate. I welcome the review.

Like the majority of people in Britain, I enjoy fireworks. I have taken part in displays in a family environment since my earliest years and I would not want to deny such pleasures to others. Fireworks are extremely popular in Saddleworth in my constituency, and the Round Table and other local groups take every opportunity to organise displays of a high standard. I hope that my constituents and I will continue to share that pleasure.

My first concern is about the period during which fireworks should be on general sale. The guidelines agreed some years ago say that fireworks should be on sale for only three weeks before 5 November and a few days after. My impression is that those guidelines are becoming loose and that fireworks are on sale earlier than they should be.

This year, fireworks day seemed to go on for a long time, perhaps because 5 November fell mid-week and people increasingly prefer to have family parties on weekends rather than on the due date, and because the weather on 5 November was not pleasant in many parts of the country. I received calls the following week saying, "When is this going to stop? I can't let the cat and dog out because every time it gets dark there are fireworks going off all over the place." The matter needs to be reviewed.

People increasingly use fireworks on occasions other than bonfire night—to celebrate anniversaries or birthdays, for example. We must consider what special provisions should be made to ensure that fireworks are available to those who want them for legitimate purposes, but not so freely available as to extend to the whole year the period during which annoyance is caused to ordinary individuals.

The hon. Member for Northfield referred briefly to bangers. Three weeks or so before 5 November this year, I received a call from the estate management board of Holts village in Oldham, expressing concern about the number of bangers being thrown around the streets and put through letter boxes by youths, causing anguish to elderly people and others. I had another call from someone who had seen youths throwing bangers out of the back window of a double-decker bus.

There exists in legislation a maximum penalty of £5,000 for throwing a firework in a street or public place, but I have never yet heard of its being implemented by a court. The small banger is increasingly being treated disdainfully and used by youths as if it were a home firework. Perhaps that is reflected in the fact that more than 50 per cent. of all accidents with fireworks involve children under the age of 16.

I raised the matter with the managing director of Standard Fireworks and Brocks International last year. In his reply, he said:

"I well understand the problems caused to the general public and in particular the elderly through the misuse of bangers and other noisy fireworks."

In a revealing and honest statement, which is unlikely to boost his marketing effort, he said:

"The Standard Fireworks banger is the most ineffective banger on sale in the UK today. Our sales have continuously been falling, from a high of 7 million to 2.5 million last year."

I acknowledge the fact that Standard Fireworks has been closely involved with the Government in reviewing guidelines and codes of conduct, and I approve of the attitude that lies behind what the managing director said—his letter went on to express his concern about the importation of much more powerful bangers—but the simple, cheap single banger is increasingly being used as a weapon and as a means of disturbing and frightening people in many estates and communities throughout the country. It is perhaps time, as with ripraps, crackerjacks, squibs or whatever, to introduce a complete ban on the sale of bangers.

Most accidents involving fireworks affect young people aged under 16. How do they get hold of such fireworks? It is illegal for fireworks to be sold to people under 16. When the matter was raised in the 1 November debate last year, the hon. Member for Northfield—I remember that I was unable to make an intervention—mentioned that trading standards officers were concerned about how regulations had been changed, because that had made it more difficult for them to enforce the law. The Government said that the existing regulations and laws gave trading standards officers the authority to enforce the rules. However, in practice, trading standards officers still find it difficult. They admit that it is possible to carry out enforcement, but it is more cumbersome, bureaucratic and time consuming and they have other things to do with their limited resources than concentrate on that one problem.

In trying to reduce bureaucracy for small businesses by scrapping the regulations concerned, the Government threw out the baby with the bathwater. Governments are never willing to accept that mistakes have been made, but I hope that in this case they will recognise the due concerns of trading standards officers. I spoke to trading standards officers in Oldham and Rochdale only an hour ago and they said that, against their will, they had made no effort to prevent the sale of fireworks by shops to children under 16, but had referred the matter to the police. They did that because they believe that the regulations are too cumbersome and need revision. I ask the Minister to ensure that he takes the opportunity of the consultation to listen to their concerns and review the regulations. I hope that by this time next year, more simplicity will have been introduced into procedures.

The point of the hon. Member for Northfield that mortar shells are classified as class 3 fireworks was well made. Mortar bombs and the like have instructions that state that they should be used at least 25 m from the public and are clearly inappropriate for most domestic gardens. They should be reclassified as class 4 fireworks.

There is also the increasing use of fireworks to celebrate new year's eve. I go out of my house at midnight on that night and from all the hills around me I can hear fireworks going off and see lights in the sky. The crucial problem with the use of fireworks on that day, which makes it different from bonfire night, is that on 5 November, most fireworks are let off between 6 pm and 8 pm; those on new year's eve are let off at midnight. It is likely that people who let fireworks off on bonfire night will be sober, but on new year's eve, they are likely to be intoxicated. If I had a simple answer, I would give it, but I ask the Minister to take that point into consideration in the consultation paper. I hope that he finds a means of tackling the problem and reducing the likelihood of accidents.

10.3 am

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) on introducing the debate so meticulously. He has been through the detail, and I shall not bore the House by repeating his sensible suggestions. I shall merely reinforce his points and hope that the Minister comes back quickly and strongly on everything that he said.

I must declare an interest as the Member for Huddersfield. Not in my constituency, but nearby in Colne Valley is Standard Fireworks, the largest producer of fireworks left in Britain. It is an excellent company that employees several hundred people and is renowned in the House and outside for its interest in safety and its good-quality fireworks. I congratulate the company, the last of the big fireworks companies in Britain, on maintaining high standards of production and of regulation of its activities and on its tremendous work in putting its own money into safety and in trying to ensure that people can enjoy a traditional holiday. One does not need a day off to have a holiday. Bonfire night is a holiday tradition that goes back to 1605. I do not know when fireworks were first let off, but it was long ago. It is deep in our tradition.

I resent the killjoy tendency in Britain whereby when there is a crisis or accident, there is an emotional spasm that says that everything must stop. I share the deep feeling of sympathy of my hon. Friend the Member for Northfield for the people who died recently as a result of fireworks, and for their families. I feel strongly about the way in which their deaths were caused. However, we have to balance that with the fact that fireworks are a traditional way of celebrating 5 November, Guy Fawkes' day or plot night, as we call it in the north. I do not think that it should be stopped. Fireworks can be safe if they are good fireworks, properly regulated and let off sensibly.

There are, of course, dangers. If people who are not adult or experienced enough let off fireworks, there can be tragic consequences. But they can be overcome. The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) mentioned the honesty of the chairman and managing director of Standard Fireworks about his bangers. He has been equally frank with me. It is a part of his market, but I am sure that he shares my view that if there were no banger market, Standard could cope with it. Most of us know that the real enjoyment of 5 November and of fireworks is the colour and beauty of a firework display. My view is heartfelt because I have an interest and because I know that there is a tradition that is precious to many millions of people. I want that to continue.

I am going to say some hard political words. The Conservative party is the great party of deregulation. Since I have been in the House, it has shouted it from the rooftops. The high priests of deregulation, whether Front Bench or Back Bench, cannot wait to tell us that the state should not get involved in anything. They want total deregulation. Let the buyer beware, let people buy anything they like and let off anything they like. Fireworks are a classic example of what happens when that ruthless attitude to deregulation comes home.

The Minister will not like me saying that two people died this firework weekend because of deregulation. They died partly because of the deregulatory attitude of the Government, who have weakened controls against the best advice of the industry in Britain and of senior staff at Standard Fireworks. They said that we should not deregulate and that if we did, we would get all sorts of dangerous rubbish from China and elsewhere and accidents would occur. That was self-interested, because if accidents happen, people say that fireworks should not be let off at all and that we should end fireworks. I have been involved in the matter for some years. I have heard the industry and my hon. Friend the Member for Northfield say that deregulation will spoil it for everyone. Yes, it will; deregulation has spoilt the lives of families whose loved ones have either died or been dreadfully injured by fireworks that have come in from abroad.

The incident was not isolated. I went to my village and someone in a shop showed me a firework costing £60, which was about the size of a birthday cake. It was not for a special occasion or display, but for anyone to buy. Trading standards officers do not have the power, effectiveness or will that they used to have. A parallel can be drawn with the sale of alcohol: a survey of who could buy alcohol in my area was conducted in recent weeks. The police sent a nice letter to all off-licences asking them to stop selling alcohol to young people. The police said that it should be done the easy way, and that there was no need to be heavy—the young purchasers should be identified and the sales stopped. But the campaign did not seem to be effective.

The police sent 14-year-old boys into off-licences: 20 out of 31 served those boys with alcohol—in two cases, they were served by a 13-year-old and a 12-year-old. As I went round my area before 5 November, I found that precisely the same happens with fireworks: very young children get hold of them and the deregulatory climate seems to be responsible.

The situation is bad enough, with deregulation and the people who have been injured or killed as a result. But, worse, two years ago there was a death in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe)—he will speak in more detail about that. The coroner spoke directly to the Minister involved and said that such evil fireworks should not be brought in. For two years, the Government have done nothing about those fireworks, which have come into this country and killed people.

I have spoken strongly about the subject. I do not want to be a killjoy; I want our lovely festival to continue; I want proper curbs. I have no special mandate for bangers, which are misused, and I have no special case to make for the extension of the time for using fireworks. The traditional period in our country is quite short—about three weeks—and I see nothing wrong with that period being strictly enforced in terms of the sale of fireworks, apart from their use in displays.

Some of us who were holding meetings in the House of Commons on 5 November almost thought that we were under attack. I had booked a Room overlooking the river, and there was a fantastic firework display on the launch just outside the House of Lords. It was a magnificent, safe and enjoyable event, which showed how fireworks can be used.

If the Government continue their deregulatory, care-for-no-one attitude, more people will die. If the Minister does not take action before next year, other people will die. But by then there will be a Labour Government who will ensure that firework displays are safe.

10.14 am

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) on giving us the opportunity to debate this important issue.

I want to start my speech where my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) left off. We are not here as killjoys to try to stop people enjoying themselves or to try to stop various organisations and religious bodies celebrating holy days—that is nonsense. The Firework Safety Bill and the debate are about the effect that fireworks can have on ordinary citizens who have no argument with people enjoying themselves, but are merely asking for some consideration. Animal owners also need consideration, but I shall come to that subject later. This is a debate not about how to stop people enjoying themselves, but about how we can find a way of ensuring that people can still celebrate while protecting those who are greatly affected by fireworks.

No one doubts the fact that fireworks give pleasure. I thoroughly enjoy attending the displays at my local park. It is worth congratulating local authorities and other organisations that put on tremendous displays, in safety, and that often educate children on the dangers of fireworks, how to place them safely and how to stand away. People should be congratulated on holding firework displays and educating others.

Safety is a priority, particularly for organised bonfires. As my hon. Friends have already said, how can it be safe for someone to let off a £20 or £60 shell in their back garden if he is meant to stand 25 yd away from the firework? Many back gardens are not 25 yd long, so people would have to stay in the house—the firework would no doubt blow all the windows out. One firework, which must have misfired, came over my fence and exploded above the lawn. I was amazed that none of my windows were blown in. All the fire alarms, burglar alarms and car alarms went crazy. Who knows what would have happened if anyone had been within a couple of yards of that firework—admittedly, it misfired. Some fireworks have a shell casing, which is almost like shrapnel when they explode. We need to regulate such fireworks, some of which are powerful.

Most people enjoy the visual aspect of firework displays, which are fine if they are beautiful spectacles with a few crackles, but I see nothing visually beautiful about one big thud that frightens half the population to death and is then over. There is a difference between the two types of firework displays. I have doubts about how we can regulate the use of most fireworks. By banning bangers, we have gone a long way to answer most of the complaints raised in our surgeries.

I received a typical letter from an old lady in my constituency. She wrote:

"Dear Mr. Michie,

I sit in my home this evening, and feel as if I have been living in a war torn area for well over a month now".

She goes on to describe the loud explosions and the difficulties that she faces. She mentions the advice given by Rolf Harris on his programme when he told people to ensure that they kept their animals in on bonfire night as it was likely to be distressing for them. Keeping a dog or a cat inside for one or two nights is one thing, but how can someone keep a pet in for about two months, which seems to be the period in Sheffield?

At the end of her letter, the old lady makes a plea. She asks:

"Yes, people have rights and some things are difficult to enforce, but could you please help us, speak up for us, the fed up majority, and quieten the minority that disturb the peace over a sickeningly long period of time?"

The letter finishes, "Help". I know that, like that old lady, some live in blocks with other old people, and I have talked to them. They are terrified at the sheer noise, which affects them psychologically.

I do not know whether we can restrict the time for selling. As my constituent said, that may be difficult because we have to consider religious groups that celebrate at different times of the year. It may be difficult to restrict the time during which fireworks can be used—it might be a good idea if they are not used after midnight—but it would not be too difficult to control the sale of fireworks. That would not stop people hoarding them and setting them off at the wrong time, but it would stop what is happening in a shop not far from where I live. It is open many hours a day, including Sundays, and sells nothing but fireworks for months on end. It encourages people to make impulse buys. If a child walks past the shop and realises that he has enough spending money to buy some fireworks, he will go in and purchase them. Restricting the times and dates on which fireworks can be sold may help to ease the problem.

As I said earlier, taking bangers out of the equation is certainly the most effective way of helping the majority of people. Old people and animals live in fear. Unfortunately, I no longer have a dog—mine died of old age many years ago. It was a sheep dog of a nervous disposition, to say the least, and for bonfire night and perhaps the night after, I used to get a tranquilliser for him from the vet. It did not actually knock him out but, for some unknown reason, he used to walk about as though he had gone deaf, so it obviously worked. The problem is, however, that it is not possible to keep giving animals tranquillisers for two months or more, just because some great firework might go off. There are therefore limits to what animal lovers can do to protect their animals, just as there are limits to what old people can do to protect their nerves.

The onus remains on the House to find some way of restricting bangers or, hopefully, banning them altogether. We must take action on behalf of those who do not want to kill the joys and pleasures of others, but who want only a little peace and quiet. That way all of us, not just a minority, can have a happy life.

10.20 am

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise my concerns relating to the circumstances surrounding the death in November 1994 of my constituent, Mr. Roger Robinson. His case has already been mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) and for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman).

In November 1994, Mr. Robinson organised a display for elderly people at a care home in my constituency. He was killed as the result of the explosion of an

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

aerial shell, which was exactly of the sort described by my hon. Friend the Member for Northfield. The inquest report indicates that

"The firework involved was 4 inch in diameter and is launched out of a mortar tube."

The evidence given at the inquest stated that

"the shell had a weight of almost 15 ounces, was intended to reach a height of 800 feet before ejecting its pyrotechnic effects, and would have been travelling at a speed of 225 mph when it came out of the top of the tube"—

and hit my constituent in the face.

The Minister is aware that I have been in correspondence with him, his Department and his predecessor about the circumstances of Mr. Robinson's death. I was especially concerned to learn from the Minister's predecessor—the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans)—who wrote to me on 11 August 1995, that import controls on fireworks exercised by the Health and Safety Executive had been abolished from 1 December 1993.

The Minister is well aware of the implications of that Government decision, which was presumably taken as part of the deregulation exercise mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield. The Minister will also be aware that there have been extensive representations from trading standards officers in various parts of the country, not least in West Yorkshire. Here, I commend the West Yorkshire trading standards officers; we are fortunate in our area to have some of the most effective and articulate officers in the country. They wrote to the Government stating that those aerial shells were unsuitable for the public and should be banned from public sale.

The Minister will be aware that the inquest into the death of Mr. Robinson was resumed on 30 November 1995. The coroner for my area is my namesake, Mr. David Hinchliff. At the end of the inquest, he made a specific statement, which I shall quote briefly. He stated to the court that

"pursuant to Rule 43 of the Coroners Rules,"

he intended

"to draw the attention of this fatality to the appropriate authorities, which in this case will be the Department of Trade and Industry."

Mr. Hinchliff added that he was acting

"in the hope that a fatality or fatalities of this nature can in the future be avoided, that is the very least that I feel that I can do in this situation".

I have a copy of the detailed letter that he subsequently sent to the Minister on 3 January 1996. The letter makes his feelings clear. It states:

"My recommendation must therefore be that Aerial Shells of all sizes should not be available to the general public, and that they should be sold only to people who have undergone appropriate theoretical and practical training."

I have a copy of the Minister's acknowledgment of that letter.

I know the Minister reasonably well and have always found him to be a decent and honourable man who is competent in his work. He always receives me well when we meet. However, I have to ask what has been going on—Mr. Robinson's death occurred in 1994 and the circumstances have been reported to his Department on more than one occasion. Needless deaths have occurred that might have been avoided. I do not want to make a political point—the issue is too serious for that—but deregulation appears to have overtaken common sense and the sad consequences are there for all to see.

I want to repeat the point made by other hon. Members, particularly by my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield. I know of Standard Fireworks and I and my family have used its products over many years. It is a company of repute and I want to endorse the comments made by hon. Members to the effect that the industry wants not deregulation, but more regulation. Yesterday, I met Mr. John Woodhead of Standard Fireworks, who spoke in detail of his concerns about the implications for the industry of the sort of incident that I have described. Clearly, such incidents are not in the industry's interests and Mr. Woodhead wants more regulation, especially import controls—precisely the opposite of the Government's action in 1993. He wants there to be training along the lines described by several hon. Members this morning. Judging by our conversation, I am fairly certain that Mr. Woodhead would have no objection to bangers being banned altogether.

I have received representations from constituents similar to those mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie) and the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies). People have had their lives made a misery in the period around bonfire night and they ask me why we have to have bangers. Would not having bangers really cause great difficulties? Would it really impact on the joy of bonfire night?

I am not a killjoy—in my childhood, bonfire night was one of the highlights of the year. In my area, we started preparing in August—chumping, we called it, which meant getting the wood in for the bonfire. It was a great event and I want that to continue. I do not see why we need to suffer the nuisance arising from bangers. I vividly remember the consequences for the guide dog belonging to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett). As the direct result of being frightened by a firework, the dog was run over and had to stop working for my hon. Friend, who had to get another guide dog.

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor): Comparing notes with the hon. Gentleman on our respective childhoods, I always found the bonfire more fun than the fireworks. I should like to thank him for his kind personal remarks about me and engage him not on the subject of guide dogs but on an earlier point. He referred twice to the fact that the import licensing regime was overturned in 1993. For the record, I want to make it clear that that regime was, in fact, replaced in 1993. The Health and Safety Executive will say that the single authorisation scheme that was put in place of the import licensing regime in no way weakens safety controls. One regime was replaced by another, not simply removed.

Mr. Hinchliffe: All I would say to the Minister is that I examined the issue in some detail and discussed it with representatives of the industry, whose impression is that the import controls weakened the safety aspect in this country.

Mr. Burden: The Minister is wrong—import licences were removed. The Health and Safety Executive provides

authorisation and classification on applications to bring fireworks into the country. There is no regular check at the port of entry and no way of telling whether the fireworks entering the country are the same as those for which authorisation was requested. There was no replacement—import controls have gone and they need to be brought back.

Mr. Hinchliffe: My hon. Friend makes an important point. That reflects my understanding of the industry's impression of the current position.

I conclude by congratulating my hon. Friend on initiating the debate. Without making party points, I hope that we can learn from the deaths that have occurred and that action will be taken. The action that we should take is clearly set out in the coroner's letter in respect of my constituent's unfortunate death.

10.29 am

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): I shall speak briefly because I missed the start of the debate. I apologise for that; I had to attend a meeting.

Today's debate is predominantly about import controls and about category 3 and category 4 fireworks, but I am worried about very small fireworks—those in category 2, possibly even category 1. I have been involved in previous firework campaigns, but I became involved in this year's campaign after being visited by a woman whose dog had been killed in a firework-related incident. I promised that I would support her in getting a petition together. Within days, a young man had died in my constituency because of a firework—apparently, not a big firework.

I urge the Minister to extend the scope of his review to smaller fireworks. Import controls would not have helped to save Dale Mitchell's life. I want something that would have done so—an increase in the age at which people can buy fireworks to 18. I want a licensing system. I want proper training in all categories of fireworks.

I shall present that petition to the Minister, probably at the end of this month—I hope before he announces the results of his review. He expressed his sympathy following Dale's death. I thank him for that, and hope that he will consider the petitioners' views.

10.31 am

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): This has been a debate of high calibre, probably because the only contributors have been Opposition Members of Parliament. The debate is the culmination of a campaign by Labour in Parliament, which has sought for five years to restore controls on dangerous fireworks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) has been at the forefront of that campaign, but others have supported him for many years—my hon. Friends the Members for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie). I welcome the comments of the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies).

It is important to examine the Government's record in action. Indeed, if it had only been in action, we might not be talking about the deaths today. From the questions that I tabled in 1989 to the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) to my private Member's Bill to restrict the sale of dangerous fireworks in 1994, and in Labour's calls in November 1995 and June 1996 for the banning of aerial shell fireworks, we have been outspoken in the cause of firework safety. In contrast, today, not one Conservative Back Bencher has been present to listen to us or the Minister, let alone to speak.

It was a Labour Government who, in 1975, secured strict controls on the type and power of fireworks, limited who had access to them and imposed a code of practice to regulate firework safety. Labour slashed the power of bangers and ensured that unpredictable jumping fireworks were abolished; both had high accident rates. As a result, for more than a decade, injuries plummeted to an historic low. For years, far fewer people suffered firework injuries and no one lost their life.

All that was changed when the new Tory right took over and decided to deregulate fireworks legislation. It destroyed the essential protection enjoyed by the public. The Tory ideologues covered three areas of public safety—the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Health, and health and safety. They are guilty of scrapping legislation that was the culmination of 100 years of firework safety controls.

In 1988, the Tory ideologues weakened the system of importation controls. Until that time, from 1875, the importation of fireworks was controlled by the Explosives Act 1875 Order in Council 10A. In 1988, Conservative Ministers repealed the tough mandatory checks on each type of imported firework by the Health and Safety Executive and replaced them with another system—self verification. Fortunately, importers still had to comply with strict safety rules.

In 1991, firework injuries had been cut to 723—too many, but far fewer than in countries with lax controls. The reduction in injuries did not last long. When at the DTI, the right hon. Member for St. Albans (Mr. Lilley), the hon. Members for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) and for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) and the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) all ignored warnings from the industry and from safety experts.

In 1992, the chief inspector of explosives, Mr. G. Williamson, wrote to inform the DTI that some suppliers were selling category 4 fireworks to the general public. In a prophetic sentence, he warned:

"The chance of a major incident clearly increases"—

but the then Minister, the right hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), did nothing.

In 1991, the United Kingdom firework industry lobbied the DTI for mandatory legal sanctions on the sale of dangerous fireworks. On 21 August 1990, in a letter to the DTI, our leading company, Standard Brock, said:

"There is such a huge performance gap in the present Category 3 range as to confuse the public entirely and to put proper safety in jeopardy . . . I would move"

aerial shells

"into Category 4".

Still nothing was done.

The Minister will doubtless tell us that he has a consultation exercise in hand. Sadly, it will be the third consultation exercise that the Government have launched in the 1990s, as they have sought to push responsibility for firework safety on to Europe, the enforcement agencies, the fire service, the police and the trading standards service—everyone but themselves.

[Mr. Nigel Griffiths]

The Government conducted a consultation exercise in June 1993, and another in December 1994. They received a robust response from the Association of Chief Police Officers which, on 27 January 1995, wrote to the DTI, saying:

"Under the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations it is necessary to prove only the offer to supply or the agreement to supply fireworks whereas the Explosive Act 1875 requires proof of the sale which can on occasion be more difficult to prove.

Both"

police

"forces feel that it is inappropriate to repeal this legislation and would seek to retain it".

In spite of that advice—that the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations were performing a valuable service protecting the public—Ministers went ahead and abolished them. The assurances that the Minister gave us earlier—that that made no difference and that safety was still in hand—are patently untrue.

In our previous debate on fireworks, also secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Northfield, the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs at the time, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans), when questioned about the impact of imported fireworks, said:

"We have looked at whether imported fireworks have any role to play in terms of the increase in figures. We have no evidence of that at all."—[*Official Report*, 1 November 1995; Vol. 265, c. 272.]

Is it not tragic that the evidence was to come exactly a year later because that Minister failed to take action?

In the mean time, on 3 January 1996, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield said, the coroner who looked into the death of his constituent Roger Robinson sent a damning letter to the Minister, communicating his findings. He said:

"From the evidence recorded at this Inquest it became apparent that legislative controls are required for the sale of Aerial Shells . . . The likelihood of an accident involving a shell resulting in fatal injuries is unusually high."

The Minister present in the Chamber today, who acknowledged the letter, did absolutely nothing about it. When pressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Ms Church) on 17 July this year on the Floor of the House of Commons to impose a ban on aerial shell sales to the public, he again declined to take any action. It was of course only a few months later that two people were killed by that very type of shell.

The warnings to the Government have been legion. In 1994, the chairman of the National Fire Safety Technical Committee stated:

"It would seem that if the current proposals go ahead, consumer safeguards will be lowered in an area where dangers are very well known and understood".

I asked for a meeting on 3 November 1994 with the then President of the Board of Trade, now the Deputy Prime Minister, to discuss the import and sale of category 4 fireworks following the removal of licences. The relevant Minister replied:

"We have been assured by the Health and Safety Executive that this should not have any real effect on the safety of imported fireworks . . . I do not think that there would be much to be gained from a meeting."

The Association of Metropolitan Authorities begged Ministers for a meeting with its officials in October 1995. It took six months for DTI officials to meet representatives of the association and key enforcement officers.

The sad fact is that neither we nor the general public have any grounds for believing a word that Ministers say on this subject. We know that they are lying through their teeth on tax; they are also lying through their teeth on the control of fireworks—the deaths and horrific injuries clearly show that.

The abolition of import controls has been a deregulation disaster. My colleagues have clearly spelled out what now needs to be done. First, we must ensure that those who sell fireworks over the counter are held responsible for their actions—if over-the-counter sales are to continue. There must be some doubt about that. If the injuries continue at the current horrific rate and the public have to put up with the tremendous strain of bangers and other fireworks being let off in unrecorded public incidents, the future of such sales must be in doubt.

Furthermore, we must ensure that those responsible for firework displays are properly trained and licensed, and that dangerous fireworks such as aerial shells are not available to members of the public but are restricted solely to those who run professional firework displays.

On 16 October last year, the DTI issued a press notice to the public. It read:

"Jonathan Evans warns: the best don't mess with fireworks".

The truth is that the best do not mess with firework regulations, which is precisely what the Government have done. The best do not sit on the Government Benches. The Opposition, on the other hand, intend to ensure that the British public get the best, safest firework legislation available anywhere.

10.43 am

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor): I congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) on securing this debate on an important subject. We are all aware that today's debate takes place in the aftermath of tragic deaths from fireworks this year. I know that the whole House is of the same mind in expressing condolences to the family and friends of young Dale Mitchell, Mr. David Hattersley and Mr. Steve Timcke. That serves to underline the serious issues that the Government have to consider.

As has been pointed out, there have been three deaths from aerial shells since 1994. Investigations are still continuing into the deaths of Mr. David Hattersley and Mr. Steve Timcke, and details are still emerging. It appears, however, that a significant factor in the two deaths was human error. Hon. Members will also recall the death in similar circumstances of Mr. Roger Robinson of Wakefield in 1994. In that case, no fault was found with the firework which killed him. I recognise and accept that this raises serious questions about the availability to the public of such powerful devices.

Nine-year-old Dale Mitchell died as a result of a fire started by a firework being put through the letterbox of the family home. I understand that the incident is subject to court proceedings. I have asked my officials to liaise closely with the authorities investigating the very different circumstances of each case so that we can learn the lessons from them.

The hon. Member for Northfield will be well aware that many of the matters he raised are already being considered as part of the Department's review of fireworks, and that I am giving these issues the serious attention that they deserve. As far as I am concerned, one person injured on bonfire night is too many. The answers that I have already given the House should leave the hon. Gentleman in no doubt that we intend to do what is sensible and appropriate. My priority is to arrive at a balanced judgment of what measures would be appropriate.

I hope that the House will bear with me when I say that fireworks give rise to a wide range of worries. I refer to hooligan behaviour, the purchase and use of fireworks by children, anti-social use late at night or over an extended period—all these have been mentioned. The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) mentioned the link with alcohol, and I agreed with him about that. Then there is the question of training for the organisers of displays; carelessness on the part of non-professional users; the availability of certain shells which may be dangerous in the hands of the inexperienced; and badly made fireworks or those containing illegal mixtures. I should point out that import controls are relevant only to the last of those issues. All the evidence shows that badly made fireworks are a far smaller issue than most of the others I have mentioned.

Against this background, it can be seen that there is no quick fix, but I will instigate a thoroughgoing root-and-branch review of the regulations—I give the House that commitment.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The Minister appears to be committing himself to a further review. Why, then, after he received the letter from David Hinchliff, the West Yorkshire coroner, dated January of this year and specifically calling on the Minister to re-classify all aerial shells as category 4 so that they cannot be sold to the general public—because the deceased in question was an "adult mature sensible person" who died as a result of human error—did the Minister not accept that advice and act on it in January, before bonfire night, thereby perhaps avoiding the subsequent two fatalities?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is aware of the letter that the coroner wrote to me and, I think, of my reply. The coroner's letter was a contributory factor in launching the review. The basis and framework of the review were laid down earlier this year, and it went public in July.

There are no quick fixes. Simply shuffling one kind of firework from category 3 into category 4 will not overcome all the problems that we face. I am not in the business of quick fixes; I want to be thorough. There have been changes in the market, with which I shall deal shortly.

At risk of saying it twice or three times, I do not intend to rush into knee-jerk measures that might be effective for a short period and attract congratulatory headlines, but encourage an uncontrolled black market in fireworks in the longer term, as has been the case in some countries that have strict legal controls.

Mr. Burden: I know that the Minister is short of time, so I will not detain him long. No one is asking for a quick fix, or saying that he should not carry out a review, but after three deaths in a three-year period, what more evidence does he need to ban aerial shells from public sale for a temporary period under the powers available to him, while a thorough review is carried out? Let us get them off the market and make sure that people are safe. The Minister can have his review and, if it is proved that such fireworks are safe, let him bring them back, but for goodness sake let us not have any more deaths in the meantime.

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman returns to the point that he made when he opened the debate. I will reflect on it, but I shall not oblige him here and now in the Chamber. I want to press on, as I have only nine minutes left to reply on behalf of the Government to what I consider to be one of the most important Adjournment debates for a long time. I hope that the House will allow me the opportunity to reply.

Let me assure the House that the Government take the matter very seriously indeed, as I have made clear by undertaking the comprehensive review, which I will see through. My reasons for instigating it are well documented—and shared by a number of hon. Members. The review was initiated earlier this year, well before 5 November. The reasons behind it are manifold: growing concern about the great variety and power of fireworks available to the general public; the increasing number of fireworks sold and the way in which they are used; the changed structure of the market in fireworks; the nuisance that they can cause to people, especially the elderly and, as the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie) rightly said, to animals; and the elevated level of injuries over the past two years.

The consultation document issued by my Department was, I believe, the most detailed explanation of the controls on fireworks and the most comprehensive attempt to seek views on a range of important firework issues since the review undertaken in 1975, to which the hon. Member for Northfield referred. The 1975 review resulted in the endorsement of a set of voluntary controls instituted by the firework industry. I took the view, shared by others, including many in the firework industry, that the time was past when those measures could be considered sufficient to offer adequate safeguards to the public.

A number of issues were raised today. Much has been made of the removal of import controls. I shall deal with that once and for all, before turning to other matters. The change to the authorisation system was not rampant deregulation, as the Opposition claim, but a sensible bid to establish a more thorough and equitable system that applied to both domestic and imported explosives.

In 1993, the combined effect of changes to border controls arising from the completion of the single European market, and the need to implement the explosives for civil uses directive, necessitated some change in the existing system. That directive did not apply to fireworks. However, the Health and Safety Commission took the view that a uniform system covering all explosives, including fireworks, from all origins, both member states and third countries, would have safety benefits. The implementing regulations were therefore used as a legislative vehicle to strengthen and clarify existing authorisation procedures and remove import controls.

The current authorisation regime has certain advantages over import licensing controls. At the time of its removal in 1993, import licensing did not require checks on every

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consignment brought into the country or routine testing, as hon. Members seem to believe. From 1987, licences were issued for up to five years and spot checks were made, as they are now, under the authorisation system. An import licence was issued for any firework that fell into the appropriate United Nations classification, which was very broad. The new system uses specific names which provide more precise information to enforcement bodies.

The import licensing scheme required only that a firework complied with British standard BS 7114 before final distribution. Accordingly, fireworks could be imported in a state that did not comply. There was no distinction between fireworks intended for the public and those for professional use. The import licensing scheme did not specifically prohibit dangerous admixture, which authorisation does.

A major advantage of the authorisation system is that compliance can be checked at any time, rather than solely at the time of entry.

Mr. Sheerman: Is the Minister saying that the Government did not deregulate, and that if anyone is responsible, it is not the Government but the Health and Safety Executive? Is he saying that the flood of cheap and dangerous fireworks from China that are sold with no instructions in English are nothing to do with the Minister? If so, ministerial responsibility is dead and I, for one, mourn its passing.

Mr. Taylor: That is a rather intemperate way of putting a question that is well worth answering. The issue of imported explosives is not, so to speak, black and white. The Chinese—I say this with the greatest caution—probably have more experience with fireworks than any other culture on the planet. The other factor that does not lend itself to a black and white interpretation is the fact that some of the biggest importers of firework material from China are domestic manufacturers. The issue is therefore more complicated than the hon. Gentleman's question suggests.

There are two other aspects to be taken into account in considering what the hon. Gentleman might choose to call deregulation. The import licensing regime was replaced in 1993, but the Health and Safety Executive—I associate myself with this—says that the single authorisation scheme, which is much more flexible, and which replaced it, in no way weakens safety controls.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: It has.

Mr. Taylor: We differ about that.

Mr. Griffiths: Look at the figures.

Mr. Taylor: With two minutes to go, I am not sure how useful it is for the hon. Gentleman to intervene on me from a sedentary position. I have not yet finished dealing with the question about deregulation, as the Opposition choose to call it. I mentioned import licensing and its replacement. The second aspect is the revocation of the 1986 firework safety regulations, which took place in 1995 and has not weakened the hand of trading standards officers. Local authorities can authorise trading standards officers by simple resolution, and mark their warrant accordingly in these particular areas of activity. In those circumstances, trading standards officers can prosecute retailers.

The present authorisation system applies to imported and home manufactured fireworks alike. Suppliers will be in breach of the law unless each and every item that they supply fully meets the published criteria set by the Health and Safety Executive's explosives inspectorate.

I am beaten by the clock, but I would like to offer to all hon. Members present a letter that will cover any unanswered questions.

Social Services (Lancashire)

11 am

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): On 22 November 1995, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) was fortunate—in the same way as I have been this morning—in obtaining an Adjournment debate on the subject of social services in Lancashire, which was responded to by my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), who was then the Minister responsible.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North drew attention to the catalogue of incompetence and mismanagement of social services by Labour-controlled Lancashire county council. My hon. Friend the Minister ensured that a report into the position in Lancashire, with particular regard to community care, was made by the social services inspectorate. That report contains some very serious criticisms. In particular, the summary of the report said:

"Management of the process gave cause for concern . . . Measures to contain spending and target resources have been unpopular and not always carried out smoothly or equitably across the county . . . The Council's home care policies give an initial preference to in-house services"

and so on.

Those criticisms were brushed aside by the Labour councillor who chairs the social services committee of Lancashire county council, who bears the staggeringly inappropriate name of Councillor Humble. The one thing that none of us on the Conservative Benches has ever seen from Labour councillors in Lancashire is humility. They are completely unapologetic about all the many sins of commission and omission for which they have been responsible.

Yesterday, as a further sign of how much is wrong with the Labour party in Lancashire, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) drew attention during Prime Minister's Question Time to the recent revelations in the past few days about systematic fraud and corruption in Labour-controlled Preston council. None of this comes as a surprise to any of us on the Conservative Benches, and all those matters are connected. There is a seamless web of connections between the main Labour-controlled borough councils in Lancashire and the Labour group on the county council.

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): Is my hon. Friend aware that some of the people mentioned in the auditor's report to which I referred yesterday are members not only of Preston borough council but of Lancashire county council?

Mr. Hawkins: As my right hon. Friend says, in some cases they are the same people; in others, for example, there will be a husband on the county council and a wife on one of the borough council Labour groups, or other forms of "partners" that the Labour party so often go in for, with one partner on the county council and another on the borough council. The connections are closest between county hall in Preston and the Labour Lancashire county councillors who run personal empires from there, and Labour councillors on Preston borough council. There is much that is rotten in the state of Lancashire, and all that is rotten is Labour.

I now come to the specific effects that this has on the people who are unlucky enough to have to rely on the appalling Labour-controlled county council for care when they need it. What are the details of the huge amounts that Lancashire county council has been provided with—out of taxpayers' money—by the Government to spend on social services? In 1990-91, Lancashire county council had £92 million. By 1993-94, this had risen to £147 million. In 1994-95, it was £169 million—up £22.6 million in one year—and by 1995-96, it was £185 million.

How has Labour-controlled Lancashire county council organised its affairs given those huge amounts? In 1993-94, the county council underspent by £6.3 million. The Conservative group on the county council wisely recommended that that be carried forward. Instead, Labour put it into its general balance for other use—or, more likely, misuse. In 1994-95, the county council found that it had miscalculated so badly that it faced a possible overspend of £14 million. Its response was to withdraw home help services.

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd (Morecambe and Lunesdale): My hon. Friend should be congratulated on mentioning that point. He will be aware that many of the elderly and others in my constituency have suffered from those cuts. He mentioned the cut in the social services budget of £6 million in 1993-94. Perhaps he will go on to deal with the figures, but I invite him to comment at this stage on the fact that it was also cut by £3 million in 1995-96. I understand that there is a large underspend this year. I find those cuts quite unacceptable and I should be grateful for his comments. Does he agree that the only explicable reason why the county has done this is to build up a war chest for next year's council elections?

Mr. Hawkins: My hon. Friend makes an important point. One is bound to be suspicious, in the light of history, of precisely why those sudden cuts were made, and it is our constituents who are suffering. There is undoubtedly political gerrymandering going on with the budgets. I know that my right hon. Friend's constituents have suffered badly. Independent evidence shows that damage has been done in many parts of Lancashire—a point that I shall come to later.

We have covered all of this in the House before, but more scandals continue to crop up. There was the scandalous overspend by Lancashire county council on a new social services home in Bold street, Blackburn. It spent so much on that—about £240,000 to £260,000 for a small number of residents, at a cost of about £26,000 per resident, while there was a vast increase in the budget for social workers—that it became a byword for the incompetence of the social services committee, which refused to use the vastly cheaper but much better provisions in large private sector care homes in Lancashire. Many of the people who provide private care home facilities are members of the excellent Lancashire Care Homes Association, which has done its best to present their case for greater use of their facilities.

The scandal of the hugely expensive home in Bold street, Blackburn came to light because of the diligence of a Conservative councillor in Blackpool, John Woolley, who was presented at a different committee with a large—in his view excessive—claim by a Lancashire county council social worker for a big increase in travel

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allowances. Councillor Woolley rightly kept digging until he uncovered the whole story. So often, at Labour-controlled Lancashire county council, it is a case of jobs for the boys and jobs for the girls.

The debate grows mostly out of the latest scandal from which some of my constituents have suffered personally. Mr. and Mrs. Gardner of Knaresborough avenue, Blackpool have a son, David, now aged seven. David, sadly, suffers from cerebral palsy and needs a lot of extra care. The Gardners have had a lot of help from charities, especially Scope and the Leonard Cheshire Foundation. Unfortunately, they have been among the many families who have been badly let down by Lancashire county council social services. The biggest problem has been a lack of continuity of care for David. As the Gardners have said to me in their many visits to my surgeries over the past year or more as the case has developed, every time there is a change of social worker, the plans for what the social services department offers to provide seem to change.

The only part of Lancashire county council that seems to work properly and has helped the Gardners is the welfare rights service. I give credit, on behalf of the Gardners and other constituents, to the genuine help that Alun Pugh, Jim Dickson and their team have given, for which they were rightly recently awarded the Government's charter mark.

The Gardners, however, have not been so fortunate with the social services at Lancashire county council. Despite their general practitioner, Dr. Morrison, writing a strongly worded letter to social services at the end of 1995 urging continuity in the care facilities provided for David, the plans have continued to change. There were all sorts of problems with David's speech therapy service, but the most important feature of the case was the proposed changes to the service provided for David at his home.

Frustrated with this long saga, I decided to take up the matter with the Leonard Cheshire Foundation, which was involved in providing much of David's at-home care. The council wanted to withdraw that care and I thought it was important, not only for the Gardners but for so many of those whom we represent in Lancashire, to seek an independent, unimpeachable view from a charitable source about the case and about the general picture of Lancashire county council social services provision.

I was delighted to receive an extremely detailed letter on the subject, from Martin Perona-Wright, director of services in Lancashire for the Leonard Cheshire Foundation. He said:

"All the staff, Manager, supervisors and care attendants who have been involved with the care of Mr. and Mrs. Gardner's son David, share the considerable concern about the future. Continuity of care and choice by the client appear to be of secondary importance to financial considerations. We operate in Lancashire against the competitive backcloth of a policy which refers every client in the first instance, to their own Home Care service".

That is the county council's service. Conservative Members constantly make that precise point and my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North referred to it in his Adjournment debate in late 1995. The letter continues:

"The Local Authority service—which is not subject to the same rigorous annual Inspection, which the LCF Care at Home Services in Lancaster and Blackpool have recently undergone—can therefore cherry pick the services and clients to whom they wish to provide a service. Charities such as this suffer from lack of continuity—plenty of early morning, evening and weekend work"—

in parenthesis, I point out that those are the times when it does not suit social workers to work—

"but little cost effective continuous Monday to Friday care. Small wonder we are deemed to be expensive!"

On the specific case, Mr. Perona-Wright goes on to say, on behalf of the charity:

"If left to this organisation and it were the wish of the Gardners, we would be willing to continue David's care and support, despite the fact we provide a quality of input and care in excess of that purchased by the Local Authority. (What about the principle of direct payment and/or topping up for domiciliary home care services—has either of these practicalities been discussed with the Gardners? The answer is in the negative because neither feature has been adopted by Lancashire County Council Social Services Department!). We have only today"—

the letter is dated 22 October—

"been verbally"—

I stress, not even in writing—

"informed that our services are no longer required from the 2nd November and no reasons have been given for the change."

That major charity was given about 10 days' verbal notice that everything was about to change. Mr. Perona-Wright goes on:

"You might find the attached extracts from the booklet 'Community Care in Lancashire—Your Charter' useful. I have marked those statements which appear to be being breached in this case".

The social services department document, "Information about Community Care Services", contains all sorts of fine words. It states:

"If it is agreed that you will receive services to help you stay in your own home you can expect:

that the detail of the service and the arrangements for its provision will be discussed with you. Your preference is taken into account."

As Mr. Perona-Wright says, there was no question of preference in this case. The document goes on to say:

"that disruption in the established pattern of service will be kept to a minimum."

There is no question of social services sticking to that aim in this case. The document goes on:

"Community care aims to put service users and their carers first. In any dealings with community care services you can expect:

to have an opportunity to present your views in any assessment of your needs".

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that social services brochures and documents are unreliable? Does he recall the document that I produced in last year's social services debate which featured my constituent Geraldine Robinson on the cover? She suffers from cerebral palsy and was told that, as a result of Lancashire county council's mismanagement, her budget for domiciliary care would be cut from £700 to £300 per week and that her 24-hour care package would be reduced to only 34 hours of care per week. That is disgraceful.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The hon. Gentleman is making a short speech. Interventions, by their nature, should be short.

Mr. Hawkins: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I pay tribute to the way in which he continues to pursue—

as all Conservative Members seek to do—the manifold sins and wickednesses of Lancashire county council under Labour. It is extraordinary that both my constituent's case, which I am highlighting today, and the case raised by my hon. Friend involve cerebral palsy sufferers. The Labour group on Lancashire county council social services committee appears to have learned nothing from my hon. Friend's splendid debate, to which many hon. Members contributed, in November 1995.

Mr. Atkins: Conservative Members of Parliament from Lancashire are conscious of the importance of this case in raising the profile of the debate. Does my hon. Friend accept that Conservative Members who represent Lancashire constituencies each week come across instances of the council's churlishness, incompetence, downright rudeness and its failure to care about people who need attention? That is a most damning indictment of Lancashire county council.

Mr. Hawkins: I could not agree more with my right hon. Friend. About half the cases presented at my surgery each week relate to complaints about Labour-controlled Lancashire county council social services. The real problem is the difference between the fine words in the pamphlets and the actions of the social workers on the ground—the two simply do not match. All the fine words in the world will achieve nothing if the actions do not deliver on the promises.

In Lancashire county council social services documents, one sees not only fine words but political propaganda. I have an official social services document that is supposed to be factual. The document about financial assessment entitled, "Guidelines for Completion of FIN 96", refers to cutting home help services almost overnight—a point that my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox-Boyd) mentioned earlier. In the third paragraph, it states:

"However, they"—

that is, the social services committee—

"were mindful of the Government under-funding of Community Care".

That assertion is not only inaccurate and disgraceful, but political propaganda presented in a supposedly official form about financial assessment. We must continue to highlight that sort of disgraceful behaviour.

I shall complete my quotations from the letter from Mr. Perona-Wright, the director of services in Lancashire for the Leonard Cheshire Foundation. He concludes:

"I hope these comments will help you pursue the Gardners' case. One would like to see"—

as we all would—

"the interests of individuals—particularly those with disabilities—and their families being of paramount focus. Regrettably in this instance David's best interests appear not to be being served by an unnecessary and enforced change of carer agencies—a change to which no-one, apart from Social Services personnel, appears to subscribe. Please do not hesitate to come back to me if you feel I can be of any further help."

I immediately faxed that letter to social services, which picked up one or two minor details in its reply but failed to address the substance of the points raised.

However, there was good news this week for the Gardners, who applied for a review of their son's case. My Conservative colleague, John Woolley, the county and Blackpool borough councillor, presented the Gardners' case at the hearing and he managed to win the review on their behalf on Monday. I pay tribute to his achievement. It was a case of the social services department maintaining its fixed opinion in opposition to the views of the charity that was involved in the child's care and against the interests of the family. The Gardners managed to retain that care only through the diligence of a Conservative councillor. That case is yet another object lesson in the practices of Lancashire county council.

Mr. Atkins: The council's reaction to an independent charity is not confined to social services. In education, the county council has refused to accept the existence of dyslexia, and has ignored the specialist, charitable and professional advice of Conservative Members' constituents about children with dyslexia.

Mr. Hawkins: My right hon. Friend makes an excellent point about dyslexia, which relates closely to the David Gardner case, because one of his problems was with speech therapy. Under Labour, Lancashire county council constantly lets down the people whom it represents.

I was extremely grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister when, shortly after he took up his new post, he sent us a copy of a letter, which he had sent to the deputy clerk of Lancashire county council, headed:

"Implementation of Community Care in Lancashire".

I pay tribute to the Minister for stressing that it was essential for Ministers to know what action the authority was taking to address the issues covered in a previous letter that had been sent during the summer. The Minister wrote:

"Those were serious concerns requiring a constructive response. I look forward to receiving a full account of your action plan".

It is essential that we keep up the pressure.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Does my hon. Friend agree that, although Lancashire county council received the Minister's letter asking what it was going to do, there is little evidence that it is doing a great deal? Indeed, rather than doing anything, it is prevaricating and stretching matters out so that none of the recommendations is implemented.

Mr. Hawkins: My hon. Friend is right. The purpose of today's debate was to keep up the pressure and to draw attention—as my right hon. and hon. Friends have done—to the fact that Lancashire county council seems to take no notice of evidence from charities, of what people who need care say and of what Ministers or the social services inspectorate say. We have had repeated reports from the social services inspectorate and the district auditor containing savage criticisms of Labour-controlled Lancashire county council.

To emphasise the final lesson to be learnt, I shall use some of the words that were used by another party in the past. Under Labour, do not be old, do not be young and disabled, do not be any age and disabled and do not suffer from cerebral palsy, because all that the Labour party will do is publish fine words in expensive brochures, provide social workers with huge travel allowances and increase the budget for, and the number of, administrators at county hall. The one thing Labour will not do is provide

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people with care. The country should know that Labour in Lancashire shows what it would be like if the country were ever unwise enough to elect a Labour Government. Do not be old, disabled or young and in need of care, because Labour will provide only glossy brochures and highly paid social workers, but no proper care when it is needed.

11.23 am

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I am glad to have the opportunity to speak in this debate and to paint a different picture from that painted by the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins). Whatever the hon. Gentleman's fate may be, he will not be a Member of Parliament representing a Lancashire constituency after the general election. He has chosen the chicken run and has fled Blackpool before he loses his seat at the next general election.

It is a tragedy that every time Conservative Members initiate a debate about Lancashire, all that they do is to attack, criticise and paint an untrue and misleading picture. They know that I am a strong supporter of unitary local government. I would like Lancashire county council ultimately to go, and social services to be provided at borough council level. Having said that, I fully support the work of Lancashire county council. It does an extremely good job, and social services is one of the important services that it provides.

It was regrettable that the hon. Member for Blackpool, South and the right hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) chose to have a totally unjustified go at Preston borough council. Their allegations against Labour councils, including Burnley—their allegations went wider than Preston—were unjustified. I hope that they will repeat some of their remarks outside the House. Whatever the criticisms in the report that was published on Monday, the leader of Preston borough council, David Borrow, and his predecessor, Valerie Wise, are most anxious that any allegations against officers or members of the council are fully investigated, even if they concern activities which took place eight or nine years ago.

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Gentleman mentioned me by name and yesterday I asked the Prime Minister a question about Preston borough council. If the hon. Gentleman has seen the independent auditor's report, he will know that the criticism was directed specifically at Preston borough council—I made no allegations against Burnley or anywhere else. Labour councillors and some officers were accused of, among other things, corrupt and criminal practices. I do not care when that was: Labour was in control whenever that took place, and it has cost Preston taxpayers millions of pounds.

Mr. Pike: I accept what the right hon. Gentleman says. Conservative Members criticise Labour councils, but they do not make the same criticisms of Westminster council, which has been severely criticised for its actions. I do not condone any wrong actions by Preston borough council, but its present leader and his immediate predecessor have strongly condemned the actions that have been criticised. The hon. Member for Blackpool, South said that this case was typical of Labour authorities, and he made serious allegations. I accept that the right hon. Member for South Ribble yesterday and in his intervention today referred specifically to Preston, so my comment about Burnley did not apply to him.

I agree with the right hon. Member for South Ribble about the welfare rights services, which received a charter mark earlier this year. I pay tribute to Paul Burgess and his team throughout the county, and to Richard Roxburgh, an officer in Nelson, with whom I deal on many local issues. They provide an excellent service to the people of Lancashire.

The hon. Member for Blackpool, South has rightly taken a strong interest in the Gardner case. The individuals involved had a right of appeal. In the latter part of his speech, the hon. Gentleman said that that had been dealt with earlier this week. They exercised their right of appeal, and on that appeal panel were two Conservative and one independent councillor. Under Lancashire county council's system, people are entitled to have their case reviewed by an appeal panel if they are not satisfied with the way in which it has been dealt with. The criticism of the council in that case is unjustified.

Mr. Mans: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pike: I want to be brief, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman will make a short intervention.

Mr. Mans: The hon. Gentleman mentioned unitary authorities and Lancashire county council. Does he believe that elderly people, especially those in Burnley, would be better served if their social services were provided by his authority rather than by the county council?

Mr. Pike: I do not believe that. I think that services are better provided locally. The hon. Gentleman knows that I am strongly in favour of unitary local government, and that it is the Conservative Government who set up the local government review which made a mess of it. It proposed a hybrid solution—the worst possible solution for Lancashire—with Blackpool and Blackburn being taken out. That is a great tragedy. But let us not get side-tracked on to that debate: let us keep our minds on the important issue of social services. Social services and education are the two major services provided by the county council.

The hon. Member for Blackpool, South mentioned the social services inspectorate report which followed a previous debate. In a press release dated 20 June, Louise Ellman, leader of Lancashire county council, said:

"The Government commissioned this report after a so-called Parliamentary Debate in which no Labour MPs were allowed to speak. The report says that the justification or otherwise for the complaints concerning bias in residential care have not been substantiated."

As that press release suggests, the tone of the report was very different from that of the hon. Member for Blackpool, South.

In a later press release, Joan Humble, the chair of social services, said:

"The Social Services Committee maintains a continuing review of the arrangements for social care services in Lancashire taking account of recommendations made and the guidance provided by the Department of Health and the Audit Commission. This will continue and a clear focus will be kept on the needs of the most vulnerable people in Lancashire's community."

Mr. Hawkins: In her press release, which the hon. Gentleman read out, the Labour leader of Lancashire

county council, Mrs. Louise Ellman, referred to a "so-called parliamentary debate". What sort of approach is that from the leader of a Labour authority who has been chosen as a prospective parliamentary candidate for Labour, and who aspires to come to the House? We would remember that when the lady became a Labour Member of Parliament, were she to be successful.

Mr. Pike: I think that the phrase "so-called debate" is justified when it refers to a debate in which no one is allowed to express a different point of view. The simple fact is that no one was able to express a contrary view in that debate—so it was not a real debate, allowing both sides of the case to be heard.

Mr. Elletson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pike: No, I will not.

The social services inspectorate undertook an analysis of in-house services, which was published in June. It examined allegations made about community care in Lancashire. The hon. Member for Blackpool, South painted a misleading picture: the report certainly does not constitute the damning condemnation that Conservative Members have tried to portray. It showed that levels of overall service remained comparable with, or higher than, those in similar local authorities; that there was rapid growth in purchasing from the independent sector, at a level exceeding the average for other similar local authorities; that there was rapid expansion in the purchase of domiciliary services from the independent sector, from zero in 1993 to £11 million in 1995; that, in home care services, the growth of the independent sector had exceeded that of the in-house service; that the market share of independent nursing and residential homes in Lancashire had been consistently higher than the average for shire counties and England overall between 1993 and 1995; that, subject to the availability of resources, there was a wide range of choice and flexibility for users; and that the level of resources committed to management and administration was unexceptional compared with that in other counties.

According to the analysis,

"the report fails to substantiate allegations made that there is any systematic bias towards the use of in-house residential services but instead shows that the Government Direction on choice between public and private sector residential care has been complied with".

That view of the report is very different from the view expressed by the hon. Member for Blackpool, South and other Conservative Members.

In-house services are clearly long established, and people still have confidence in them. I have visited a number of private homes: I undertook two tours during the summer recess. Some of them provided an equally good standard of care. I always say that the standard of a home cannot be judged by the carpets, curtains and wallpaper—not that those are unimportant, but I am sure that we all agree that the most important aspects of the care of elderly people are staffing and the attention given to those people. We must make the maximum use of the homes that we have; it would be absurd not to do so.

Let me say a little about charging policy. Lancashire county council has suffered severe financial restraint. Let us make no mistake: because of capping and other financial limitations, and the area cost adjustment—which has caused it major problems—the council has not sufficient money to provide the services that it would like to provide. Finance and Government are responsible for the problems, and the form to which the hon. Member for Blackpool, South referred was entirely justified in pointing that out.

The council was forced to make major cuts. One way of minimising those cuts was the introduction of a charging policy, which reduced the cuts by bringing in some money. The council tried to introduce the simplest and fairest possible system, and the level of charges is comparatively low.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Simon Burns): If Lancashire county council felt that it must make cuts because of a lack of financial resources, why did it underspend its social services budget by £1.94 million in 1993-94? Can the hon. Gentleman also explain to me, and to the people of Lancashire, why it underspent the budget by £3.4 million in 1995-96?

Mr. Pike: There have been so many changes in financing that it is difficult to adjust to those changes quickly.

Mr. Burns: What!

Mr. Pike: The Minister ought to be very careful. The hon. Member for Blackpool, South referred to a letter that he had received from the Minister, but the Minister chose to send that letter only to Conservative Members representing Lancashire seats. Why did he not send it to all Members of Parliament? He accused Lancashire county council of being political. I consider it very political of the Minister to choose to write—

Mr. Burns: Answer the question.

Mr. Pike: Let us deal with my point first. I am making my speech; the Minister will make his in due course. Was it not political of the Minister to act as he did? He should have written to all of us, to let us all see exactly what he is saying to Lancashire county council.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) will be dealing with these matters, but, in fact, Lancashire county council has used the money that it did not spend, having carried it forward. It believes that it is on target to spend this year's budget; indeed, there is no doubt that that is so. But to criticise a marginal underspend—[HON. MEMBERS: "What?"] It is a very big budget, and the circumstances are extremely difficult when the position is changing all the time.

Mr. Burns: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pike: No, I will not give way to the Minister again.

Mr. Burns *rose—*

Mr. Pike: Go on, then.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I appreciate that he is floundering, and I do not want to

[Mr. Burns]

cause him undue embarrassment, but will he be kind enough to explain why there was an underspend in those two years if resources were so tight?

Mr. Pike: The underspend was 1.78 per cent. I accept that no one wants an underspend—

Mr. Burns: Why was there one, then?

Mr. Pike: There are many reasons. The social services position is changing all the time.

Mr. Burns: No.

Mr. Pike: What the Minister says is entirely unjustified. In the previous year, there was a £230,000 overspend. Is the Minister saying that that was wrong? Is he saying that the spending of every Government Department is exactly on target each year? We have been looking at the Chancellor's figures for this year. There has been great variation in the public sector borrowing requirement, for instance.

Mr. Elletson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pike: No, I will not. The hon. Gentleman was not even present at the beginning of the debate—he came in late—and other hon. Members want to speak.

The charges are low compared with those of many other local authorities, with 56 per cent. of service users paying only the minimum rate of £1.55 per week. If the county council had not introduced charges, it would have had to make more cuts. The Minister may feel that the council has sufficient overall resources. That is not true. It needs more financial resources and a greater continuity of budget.

Year after year, the Government change the rules. Year after year, they cut further and cap the county council. Now is the time for the council to ensure that people can receive the services that they want. It will be able to do so when we have a Labour Government who at last recognise the importance of social services and of local government.

11.40 am

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): It gives me great pleasure to reinforce the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) because, in the 17 years that I have represented Chorley, Lancashire county council's social services department has been very uncaring. It has not controlled its budgets. It has not been efficient. In correspondence, it produces all sorts of warm words, but my constituents have been disappointed by its performance, particularly in the past couple of years.

It is unacceptable for the social services department suddenly to impose a respite home on the high-class residential area of Long Copse in Astley village in my constituency. No notice was given. There will be tremendous extra usage of resources, extra traffic and unacceptable noise and disturbance to residents in an area that is unsuitable for such a home. At the same time, I told county council officials that a disused building would have been admirable for the purpose and was within a mile of the council's chosen site. There was a need to do something about the building and to provide—I do not want to stop respite care in the community—facilities where they are needed, not in a high-class residential area. That is typical of the bureaucratic and remote services operated by the county council.

Mention has been made of residential homes and of whether provision for people who need such a service should be made in-house by Lancashire county council or by the private sector. Much of the underspend this year and two years ago occurred because the council was reluctant to place spending in private sector hands.

In that connection, there is a dramatic increase in costs. In-house residential care costs an extra £93 per resident per week, more than in the private sector. That gives rise to a difference in cost of £10 million annually between the public and private sectors and it is one reason why we do not receive best value for money from the council. The standard home care service—domiciliary care—would cost £5 million more if provided in-house rather than by the private sector. That is about £15 million straight away. Compare that with the education spend and the policy statements issued by the Labour-controlled county council in the past few years, saying that there will be cuts in education spending and in the school budgets.

We have heard about the underspending. As in the past, the county council has raised a supplementary rate with no prior notice, which was damaging to individuals and businesses. As they did then, councillors have put the money from underspending into reserves so that, just before county council elections and the probable general election on 1 May, they can show what good, honest citizens they have been on behalf of county council residents and say, "We are going to reduce this and reduce that." I should like to think so. I think that the council will be pressing for that, but let us await events.

It is crazy that, as I said, the county council says, "We need cuts, cuts, cuts in education. We cannot give enough funds to schools," and then calls for an enormous rise of hundreds of millions in the education budget and of tens of millions for education spend in Lancashire.

Mr. Atkins: Did not the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer make it clear, as my hon. Friends will recall, that, if there were to be a Labour Government, there would be no extra funds for local government? Why therefore are Labour Members saying that more money should be spent when, if they were to form a Government, they would not be making such provision? It therefore depends on Conservatives and a Conservative administration in the county—if that is what happens—being more efficient.

Mr. Dover: I agree entirely, and it is yet another example of Labour saying one thing and doing another, or intending to do another.

If there is not enough money in the county council, why underspend on social services? Why not divert funds to education? Why the enormous brouhaha and cry for an area cost adjustment investigation, and what has that shown? Lancashire is overfunded compared with, say, Cheshire. If there were a change because of the academic and independent research, Cheshire would gain, Lancashire would lose and, guess what, we would be subjected to less education and school spending.

The county pressed for the investigation. Now that it has the independent results, it does not accept them or want any changes. It wants the whole thing scrubbed.

We shall see what happens. I hope and am optimistic that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will put education at the top of the spend, as we have in the past with social services and community care. After all, Lancashire started off with the largest community care budget in Britain, and that has been frittered away over the years by inefficiency.

A few months ago, Marylands residential care home on the A6 main road in Chorley was closed. Many of the home's clients had no prior warning. There had been an appeal and a tribunal finding. They rightly telephoned me that day to say, "Why is it that our parents"—or grandparents—"are having to be moved out with no notice?" I should like that to be investigated because it is unacceptable.

As we all know only too well, recently, the home help and care assistance service was massively adjusted by the county council, to the detriment of elderly citizens. I pay tribute to the self-supporting attitude of elderly residents in my Chorley constituency, who are typical of Lancashire and who look after themselves as far as possible, but they need help and assistance, yet that has suddenly been withdrawn.

On 29 August, I wrote to the director of social services to say:

"I understand that recently you have reversed many of the decisions regarding home helps and care assistance—and I greatly welcome this."

I thought that there had been a change of mind, that the county council had realised that it was overspending, had cut here and there and had uncaringly ditched the needs of the elderly. I thought that things were looking up, but no. I received a reply on 10 September from the director of social services, which said:

"I have not reversed any decisions and neither, to the best of my knowledge, have any other senior officers. Some individuals who had home care services withdrawn or reduced in the past have sought re-assessment of their care needs—as they have always been able to do—and in some cases the social care assessment has indicated a current need for services which have then been arranged. I am aware that this has been described in some quarters as a reversal of decisions but that is not an accurate description, and the number of cases quoted appears to be inaccurate."

I thought that my praise and thanks would be reciprocated and that I would receive a sensible reply. Surely to goodness, it should not be up to the media and Members of Parliament to bring about a change of mind by the county council, in the interests of our constituents. The unacceptable situation in which services were withdrawn should never have occurred.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the difficulties is that, although—as we all accept—there are some dedicated officers working for the county council, they are constantly constrained when trying to help, by the political direction that they receive from the Labour leadership of the county council social services department, and by the type of policies that led to the unacceptable political propaganda that I mentioned earlier? Even the most dedicated people, who are genuinely concerned about caring, simply are not allowed by their Labour political masters to deliver that care.

Mr. Dover: That is borne out by a reply that I received from the director of social services. I said to her, "If you have been underspending this year and for the past two years, you must have built up reserves." She was completely unaware of any reserves, although she is looking into the matter. It shows that the officials are working as best they can, but their political masters are saying, "Do something totally different from what you really want to do."

Another example of the social services department's inefficiency concerns my constituent, Valerie Smith. Unfortunately, about 10 years ago, she lost a child in a road accident, and because of shock and mental disorder, she was in the sad situation of having another child taken away from her. After all those years, the county council suddenly wrote to her to say, "Your child has been adopted." That caused her great mental anguish, because she thought that she had rights of access and that, having proved that she was improving, she could have the child back. She then received that letter and thought that she would not be able to get her child back. However, the council then wrote to say, "Sorry; we made a mistake when we said that your child had been adopted." That is typical of inefficiency in the county council social services.

Cerebral palsy has been mentioned in the debate. Alice Allen, of Chapel lane, Chorley, is six years old and severely disabled from cerebral palsy. The county council social services issued only one orange badge to her family, although her parents work 26 miles apart from each other. Their routine is that one of them will take Alice to the centre in the morning and the other will pick her up at night. Quite rightly, they raised the issue with county council social services, but the response was, "The situation is very difficult. The rules say this and the rules say that." Senior county council officials should use their discretion to be responsive to the wishes of constituents and to issue a second badge in such cases, so that proper care is seen to be meted out to my constituents.

The purpose of the debate is to show that the county council social services department has an uncaring attitude. That is not a sudden development—Labour has controlled the council for the past 14 years—but the situation has been getting worse. It has been a long time since there was Conservative control of the council, and a caring attitude by the council.

Mr. Atkins: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend. He is providing us with a list of the problems that he and many other Conservative Members are experiencing. Does he agree that the response that we receive from the county council social services department is not always what we would wish it to be, and that a small improvement would make the management of our constituencies and action on behalf of our constituents that much easier?

Mr. Dover: I agree entirely. Perhaps it is time for the department to re-examine its arrangement of local offices and to ensure that care is available locally. Occasionally it is necessary to reorganise. I agree with my right hon. Friend that it would be better if we had more local offices, and more local officials controlling what is happening and responding to local requirements.

We do not like raising the issue of problems in social services, but we are pressed constantly by our constituents, in our surgeries and in letters, about them.

[Mr. Dover]

That should not be the situation. The Government have allocated more than enough money for social and education services, and for all the county and borough council services. We expect high-quality and caring services—particularly social services—and we want to ensure the best value for money. We have not been achieving those goals. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

11.54 am

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North–East): I congratulate the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) on his success in obtaining this Adjournment debate, which concerns not only people in Lancashire, but those across the north-west and in the rest of the United Kingdom, and, of course, most people in Bolton like to think that they are in Lancashire. I was grateful to the Minister for agreeing to see a delegation from the north-west, which included representatives from Bolton, on the first day of his appointment.

Mr. Elletson: Will the hon. Gentleman tell us what mandate he thinks he has to speak in the debate? He does not represent a seat in the Lancashire county council area, and he betrayed the electors of Bolton—who voted for a Conservative Member of Parliament. Why does not he resign now, fight a by-election, get a proper mandate and then come back to speak?

Mr. Thurnham: I will not have any lectures from the hon. Gentleman about my interest in the subjects that we are debating today. Those subjects are of concern not only to people in Lancashire, but to those across the north-west and in the rest of the nation.

Mr. Elletson: The hon. Gentleman is taking up our time.

Mr. Mans: The hon. Gentleman is not a Lancashire Member of Parliament.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Each hon. Member is entitled to be heard with reasonable courtesy. I do not expect what almost amounts to barracking.

Mr. Thurnham: The Minister was good enough to see me on the first day of his appointment. I was grateful to him for doing that, because a delegation had travelled down from the north-west of England in the expectation of seeing his predecessor. I know that it was difficult for him, because he had had the brief for only a few hours, but the delegation was extremely grateful for the opportunity to see him. Various points were made at the meeting, and detailed letters were sent later, under my covering letter of 9 August 1996.

I shall not detain the House for too long with the points raised at the meeting. Representatives of Galebrook nursing home attended, representing the Bolton Association of Residential Care Homes, and raised several issues, including the difficulty of deciding whether people in need of care should be admitted to hospital if they had been admitted incorrectly.

Mr. Mans: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance about the subject of the debate. The Order Paper clearly states that the debate is about social services in Lancashire. The hon. Member for Bolton, North–East (Mr. Thurnham) is talking about a specific case outside Lancashire. Is that in order?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Bolton, North–East (Mr. Thurnham) said that the point that he was making was relevant to the debate. I must listen a little longer to confirm that.

Mr. Thurnham: If Conservative Members were better informed, they would know that people from Lancashire go to Bolton association care homes. Therefore, the issues that I am raising are of as much concern to people in Lancashire as they are to people elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Such interventions show only Conservative Members' total ignorance of how the care system works. The concerns expressed by the Bolton Association of Residential Care Homes reflect as much on national issues of care as on the concerns expressed earlier in the debate.

Mr. Frank Hessey, from the Lancashire Association of Care Homes, made some points at the meeting, which he set out in a letter of 30 July 1996. I sent a copy of the letter to the Minister. I was a little disappointed to find that it took more than three months to receive a reply to the points raised at the meeting. I had always thought that the Minister was one of the more effective members of the Government, but the delay has shown the difficulty that he has had in mastering his brief. I hope that there will not be such delays in answering correspondence in the future. I also hope that there will be no excessive delays in issuing a White Paper on personal social services. We have been promised that such a White Paper will be published soon, and the newspapers have trailed it as being due in February.

Among the points raised by people from the north-west at the meeting was the need for rights of choice, and information about choice, for people entering care homes. There have been fears that people are not given the proper information, which they should have. I hope that, in the forthcoming White Paper, the Minister will make it perfectly clear that people who are in the process of entering a care home should be given every piece of information necessary for them to arrive at the best decision. We should start by providing proper choice for people going into residential care rather than their being given misleading information.

One of the aspects that is relevant to the debate is the number of judicial cases that have been taken up. The delegation that saw the Minister included representatives of South Lakeland Care Homes Association, who, at the time, had a judicial review pending. I ask the Minister to address the need to reform the law in that respect. It surely cannot be right, when there is so much pressure on care needs, that money is being spent on lawyers' fees in order to argue about the law.

I had a meeting yesterday with representatives of the Carers National Association, who feel that the law is in a mess. In view of pressures on the provision of care, it would be only right and proper for the Government to ensure that the law is properly understood. There should be a complete reform of community care law, so that all those concerned clearly understand it.

The Department of Health issued a press release on Friday about rising needs for community care, not only in Lancashire but elsewhere. It said that there was an 8 per cent. rise in the need for services.

Mr. Atkins: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Your predecessor ruled a moment ago on a similar point of order that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans). This debate, about social services in Lancashire, is at the behest of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins). The debate is being widened well in excess of the subject that he raised and, as a result, other hon. Members who represent constituencies in Lancashire have been prevented from speaking. Will you rule on whether the hon. Member for Bolton, North–East (Mr. Thurnham) is exceeding the brief?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I have been in the Chair for precisely 60 seconds, and in that time the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) has been entirely in order.

Mr. Thurnham: The hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover) referred to the pressure on budgets, and to the effect on education budgets as well as social services. The press release issued by the Minister's Department showed that there has been an increase in the provision for home help and home care services of 8 per cent. There have been similar increases in the provision for day care services and other personal social services. Such pressure for the provision of extra services occurs not only in Lancashire but throughout the country.

I hope that next week's Budget will take proper account of the rising need because, no doubt, there will be pressure on education budgets if there is not sufficient funding for personal social services. Local authorities will be faced with difficult decisions about how to balance those requirements if the Budget as a whole does not provide extra funding.

Mr. Dover: Will the hon. Gentleman explain in his own words why there has been an underspend on social services in the county of Lancashire this year, as there was two years ago?

Mr. Thurnham: I have no doubt that it would be a coincidence if any authority spent to the penny its exact provision. In avoiding overspending, there is always a possibility of an underspend. What is clear is that there is a great pressure on the budgets generally, and if there is insufficient funding for social services, there will be pressure to reduce spending on education—even if members of all parties agree that education should be a priority.

I hope that the Minister paid full attention to the joint local authorities' submission, which said that an extra £665 million—or 8 per cent. of the total budget—was needed to fund personal social services in the coming year. If that money is not made available, obviously there will be pressure to reduce spending in other budgets at local authority level, just as the hon. Member for Chorley described a moment ago.

The Minister's reply to my letter, following my parliamentary question asking when I would receive a reply, did not address all the points raised at the meeting to which I referred, or in the subsequent correspondence. I hope that he will be able to give full attention to the points that the delegation raised, especially those on cost shunting between health authorities and social services. The Bolton delegation felt that there should be an investigation—

Mr. Atkins: This is an abuse.

Mr. Thurnham: The issues that concern people in Bolton concern people not only in the north-west but in the country as a whole. Many people from Lancashire are in homes in Bolton and, no doubt, people from Bolton go to homes in Lancashire. It is absurd to say that people should not be allowed to go to a home of their choice. Bolton was, of course, in Lancashire for more than 800 years, and 99 per cent. of people in Bolton feel that it should be back in Lancashire. I should have thought that Conservative Members would welcome the prospect of Bolton being returned to Lancashire, as it should have remained in the first place.

The points that have been raised in correspondence with the Minister need a much fuller reply than he was able to give me in his brief letter of 18 November. I hope that he will be able to make further points in the debate, and that the White Paper that is due in February will not be delayed and will address the points very fully.

12.5 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): Following the unnecessary and unwarranted speech of the hon. Member for Bolton, North–East (Mr. Thurnham), I do not have time to elaborate on any of the points that I wanted to make in this debate, which has clearly been called for many reasons, including the usual one of trying to get at Joan Humble, who happens to be the candidate for Blackpool, North.

I want to talk about the issue of overspend. The management letter from the district auditors to county councillors in April said:

"prudence and accountability have been features of the financial arrangements in the County Council for many years. This tradition of excellence continues despite the challenge of present financial constraints."

It is true that, in 1993-94, 4.4 per cent. of the total net budget for social services in Lancashire was underspent and that in the following year, 0.13 per cent. of that budget was overspent. In 1995-96, 1.78 per cent. of that budget was again underspent. Although that is true, the reasons behind it are important.

The budget for Lancashire's social services in 1994-95 was drastically affected by the changes in the Government funding formula for community care, as no doubt the Minister will tell us. The estimated effect at the time was a reduction of £12.8 million for 1994-95. The county then expected a very significant overspend, and equally significant measures were taken by it to avoid that overspend and its knock-on consequences in subsequent years.

The effects of the process were painful and unpopular. It is true that there have been many complaints. Expenditure was squeezed in 1994-95 and 1995-96 and, at the same time, the effect in 1995-96 of the extended non-residential charging policy, which was brought in to counter the expected overspend, was being experienced.

[Mr. Colin Pickthall]

The result was a £3.4 million underspend on a net budget of £48.4 million, about which the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) complained.

At present, the level of undercommitment is about £7 million, but the monthly increasing level of commitments for this financial year means that the treasurer expects that the spending target will be fulfilled by the end of the year. It is important to note in this debate that the underspend on independent sector purchases in 1993-94 was used to ease financial pressure on the same budget in 1994-95, and the same has been true of 1995-96, moving on to 1996-97.

Capping limits have necessitated budget reductions in social services of £19.4 million in the past five years. It is also important to note that Lancashire has exceeded the Government's figure of 85 per cent. of special transitional grant being spent in the independent sector in every year that that target has been in existence. The council also spends 8 per cent. more on social services than the figures calculated in its standard spending assessment.

I must sit down to allow time for the Front-Bench speeches. I suggest to the hon. Member for Blackpool, South that his next Adjournment debate should concentrate on analysing how the Government have managed to find the £4.4 billion that they did not know they had, and about which they were boasting in the press recently. Will he demand that they restore funding to the levels that existed before the cuts and extra charges imposed this year?

12.9 pm

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): I welcome the opportunity for a debate on community care, and the comments of those hon. Members who have raised issues relating to the implementation of care in the community, but I do not welcome the personal attacks on Joan Humble. The hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) would be the first to complain if I criticised him in the Chamber without giving him an opportunity to respond. I hope that the Conservative election strategy will not involve using the Chamber to attack the Labour opponents of sitting Conservative Members.

I know that the hon. Member for Blackpool, South is off to the safer Surrey suburbs, leaving the hon. Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) to struggle to hold his seat against our excellent candidate, Joan Humble. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Blackpool, South is aware that Surrey county council, where he is off to, wrote to all its private providers last year asking for free places because it had run out of money. I think that that happened at about the same time as he was castigating Lancashire county council for incompetent management of its budget. As he knows, several areas have community care problems.

My hon. Friends have dealt ably and thoughtfully with some of the specific criticisms on resourcing. As the Minister is aware, the problem for many authorities is dealing with issues of entitlement and choice for individuals within a limited budget, often with a fragmented system of health care in which resources are not being used strategically. The case that the hon. Member for Blackpool, South raised illustrates the challenges for local authorities in allocating resources for individual family needs, taking its budgetary considerations into account. The appeal process considers those issues.

A number of cases have been taken to judicial review. That is unsatisfactory for all involved because they all have to hold their breath. Perhaps the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 could have been more thoughtfully framed. The consequence is that local authorities are attempting to deliver community care in the absence of guidelines. That is convenient for the Government, because they can blame everybody else, but it leads to unfairness, inequity and a deep sense of frustration for parents whose expectations have been raised. I sympathise with Mr. and Mrs. Gardner.

Conservative Members keep coming back to the issue of in-house services versus the independent sector. The public sector, the independent sector and the voluntary sector all have contributions to make to care in the community. It is unfortunate when they are put at each other's throats. I blame the Government for part of that problem. They seem to prefer to act in an atmosphere of competition and confrontation rather than in co-operation—the only framework within which matters can be resolved.

Conservative Members have said several times that they think that money could be saved by putting all the services in Lancashire into the independent sector, which is cheaper. They repeated that point today, but they also said that the primary considerations should be quality and choice. They cannot have it both ways, although they often try to. Last year, when Lancashire county council closed some of its homes—presumably in response to the pleas of Conservative Members that services should be shifted to the private sector—there was an immediate outcry from those same hon. Members. The hon. Member for Blackpool, South featured in the headline:

"MP joins battle to save rest homes."

Calling for a delay to the closure of one home, the hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), said:

"The most important reason for keeping the home open is the strong link it has with the local community."

The chairman of social services said, with great understatement:

"It is not easy to close down homes."

It is certainly not easy, particularly when Conservative Members on the one hand demand that the council does so and on the other hand criticise it locally when it tries to.

Mr. Atkins *rose—*

Ms Coffey: I shall not give way, because the right hon. Gentleman has taken up an inordinate amount of time in the debate. It is sad that our debate on community care is characterised by confrontation, conflict and confusion. That arises from the obsession of the Government and the Minister with what competition can deliver. We need to make changes that reward co-operation.

We support the objective of the 1990 Act: to give people genuine choice, particularly the choice to remain in their own homes. For that objective to become reality, there must be co-operation between the purchasing authorities and the range of providers. We believe that the private, voluntary and public sectors should be able to

make their important contributions. To blame Lancashire county council is to try to avoid responsibility for the legislation.

A local council cannot deliver the objectives of the Act by itself and nor can private providers or the health authority. Those objectives can be achieved only through partnership, particularly with carers, on whom we depend. They are the ones delivering community care. There are some excellent examples of good practice, showing what can be achieved by local authorities in spite of the obstacles that are put in their way.

The Minister should congratulate Lancashire county council and give it credit for some of the excellent things that it has done: for negotiating care agreements with four health authorities; for establishing joint planning with 12 NHS trusts; for establishing an intensive home care scheme, which facilitates early discharge from hospital and helps people to stay at home; for the provision of respite and short-term care; for the development of care homes to provide day care and outreach services; for the development of day care among independent sector providers; and for the joint development of dispersed housing schemes in the community.

Such initiatives are important for improving services and should be followed up across the country. There should be clearer guidance from the Department of Health on the approach to community care. Community care plans should be properly monitored by the social services inspectorate and by the NHS management executive. There should be better dissemination of information on cost-effective practices that deliver services in the most helpful way for those receiving them.

The research on social care outcomes recently commissioned by the Minister should have started in 1993. The present system of funding is obviously based on best bidders rather than best bids. I understand why. Without research on what the best bids are, it is difficult to decide which of the schemes put forward is best.

Mr. Mans: The hon. Lady has listed several ways in which matters could be improved. Does she agree that inspections for homes in the public sector should be the same as for those in the private sector?

Ms Coffey: Yes. The hon. Gentleman should have been aware that that is part of our policy.

People are sick and tired of the present situation. They are sick and tired of the chaos and failure of the community care scheme. They know that things will get better only when there is a Government prepared to lead. No amount of debates will convince the people of Lancashire that the Government are acting responsibly on community care. There is failure in services to children and in services to families. Resources are being wasted because they are not being used in the best possible way. The elderly, the sick and children are suffering. That is a reflection of a Government who do not care. If they cared, they would have got their act together on community care a long time ago.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's response. I hope that he does not simply bash Lancashire county council over the head, but will respond to the wider community care issues that it is facing.

12.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Simon Burns): First, I must congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) on securing this important debate. I am delighted also to see my right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) and my hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson), for Wyre (Mr. Mans), for Chorley (Mr. Dover) and for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox-Boyd) present, as this is an important and sensitive subject.

The provision of community care is a vital function of local authorities. It offers help and an independent lifestyle, where possible, for the most frail and vulnerable members of society. Due to the vigilance and concerns of my hon. Friends in Lancashire, it seems that we now have to have an annual debate in the House on the failings of politically motivated county councillors in Lancashire and the provision of care in the county. It is a sad fact of life that old Labour is alive and well and running Lancashire county council—not new Labour for Lancashire, but neanderthal Labour.

At a time when all local authorities should be calmly and responsibly providing community care for the enhancement and improvement of the lives of those most in need, in Lancashire a highly politically motivated group of county councillors has hijacked all that is good about community care and turned it into a party-political football for the basest of motives. I remind those county councillors that the Government's policies for community care have helped many people in Lancashire—and throughout the country—to maintain an independent life and to receive better support in their own homes when faced with the problems brought about by disability or frailty in old age. Local authorities welcomed that policy and wanted the extra responsibility that it gave them. They must now accept responsibility for the decisions that they are making as they implement the policy. That includes Lancashire.

It might be helpful if I remind Labour county councillors in Lancashire of the words of Stanley Baldwin during the St. George's by-election in March 1931. He said:

> "Power without responsibility—the prerogative of the harlot throughout the ages."

It is time that councillors lived up to their responsibilities rather than parroted meaningless platitudes and slogans that do nothing to improve or enhance the quality or provision of community care. I shall explain some basic facts of life to them. The transfer of social security funding through the special transitional grant has resulted in substantial increases in the level of care to people in their own homes, in day services and in the use of care homes to provide the short breaks that are essential for many families. People entering residential or nursing care homes have benefited from the assessment process to identify their needs and match them to a care home of their choice.

The funding arrangements that we have put in place have also resulted in substantial growth of independent sector providers, real progress towards a mixed economy of care, and better value for taxpayers' money. Those are considerable achievements, both in Lancashire and elsewhere, but I have been concerned that the

[Mr. Simon Burns]

implementation of the Government's reforms has not been as smooth and effective in some areas as we would have wished.

Several of my hon. Friends have today raised matters of serious concern about what has been going on in Lancashire. They also did so last year in a debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North. Those concerns were reiterated today by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble and by my hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool, South and for Wyre. They expressed concern about financial mismanagement and bureaucracy resulting in sudden cuts in services and other problems that Lancashire has not been able to deal with as it should.

Mr. Mans: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Burns: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South mentioned the sad case of David Gardner. I am concerned about that case. I understand that Mr. and Mrs. Gardner's complaint about lack of continuity of care has been upheld, but that Lancashire county council has not yet said what it intends to do as a result. I hope that it will learn from the lessons, problems and stress that the Gardner family had to go through to get to this point. I shall ask my officials to obtain further information about the case and respond in writing to my hon. Friend once we know more from the social services inspectorate about what has been going on.

As a result of the problems highlighted in the debate last year, my predecessor was sufficiently concerned to ask the chief inspector of the SSI to provide a full report on Lancashire. That document confirmed that there was cause for concern about how Lancashire was implementing policy in several respects. Subsequently, the chairman of the social services committee, Mrs. Joan Humble, received our analysis of the problems and was asked to respond with an action plan. Our analysis raised serious issues, which required a considered and constructive response. Mrs. Humble's initial reply did not demonstrate such a response. After time for further and, thankfully, more mature reflection, however, a plan was duly received from Lancashire in September. I have asked the chief inspector of the SSI to monitor and report back to me on the implementation of that plan.

I am concerned to emphasise to Lancashire county council that decisions about the allocation of services should be taken and applied consistently, and with sensitivity to the needs and feelings of service users. The council has responded with assurances that disruptions in the continuity of care, which occurred in earlier years, have now been dealt with and that more effective monitoring arrangements are in place. I hope that that is indeed the case, and I shall be looking for evidence of that when Lancashire's action plan is reviewed.

I am also concerned that changes to the balance of services should avoid unnecessary disruption to service providers. The council has responded with an intention to publish its purchasing policies in a form that will be more readily accessible to service users and providers. Good communication among commissioners, providers and users of services is essential to effective management of local change, and it is particularly important that providers are clear about the intentions of the council in determining its requirements for the future and clarifying how it will use its growing resources to meet those ends and needs.

The funding of community care has featured heavily in this debate, particularly in the comments of the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike). Total personal social services funding by the Government is a massive £9 billion including the social security contribution. That is a phenomenal amount of money compared with what was being spent in 1990.

I have also heard a great deal of protest from the county council about its inability to manage community care without even more money. When I look at the figures, however, I see an interesting picture. Within the total amount that the Government consider the county council needs to spend this year to provide a reasonable level of service is an element of £156 million for community care, which includes £61 million for its new responsibilities and the community care reforms. That represents an increase in total resources for community care since 1990-91 of 104 per cent. in real terms—over and above the rate of inflation. That means that Lancashire has done even better than the national average, which was a doubling of resources in real terms during that period.

It is for each local authority to set its budget, but given the accusations made by Lancashire, I find it surprising that it underspent in two financial years. It was clear that the hon. Member for Burnley was unable to explain that and the so-called justification offered by the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) made me remain deeply sceptical of the line that he was trying to push.

Given the length of time that I have to reply, I shall not be able to cover all the points that I was prepared to cover. What I will say is that Lancashire is a concern. The SSI has looked into Lancashire. A plan has been drawn up, and it will be monitored with vigour because, as my hon. Friends have so rightly identified in the debate, it is crucial that people in Lancashire are given the best, most satisfactory and most effective care without the worries and disruption that, sadly, they have had to put up with all too often. It is crucial that Lancashire establishes a good rapport and working relationship with the private sector, which plays such an important role in providing help and care for those who need it.

My hon. Friends and others have raised interesting and useful points about how things are going in Lancashire. As I have said, I shall ask the SSI to monitor the situation there closely. In particular, I shall ask the chief inspector to seek further explanation from the council of its financial management and to consider whether further action by central Government is necessary. I do not take that decision lightly, but because of the excessively long-running problems that I have highlighted, it is the least that I can do to ensure that there is better provision of care.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I want to place it on record, for the guidance of hon. Members, that these are Back-Bench debates and that both Front Benches should recognise that the wind-up should not be longer than 20 minutes.

Waste Recycling (Scotland)

12.30 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to have a short debate about an important subject. As an Opposition Member, I spend most of my time denouncing Government policy as rubbish, so it is a pleasant change to discuss proposals on rubbish. We can make jokes about it—we shall no doubt hear many puns and bons mots, because I know that the Minister has a reputation for a scintillating sense of humour—but it is a matter of some importance and concern.

The concern is not about the Government's stated strategy and objectives—since the introduction of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, everyone recognises that they have been on the right track in trying to give a lead in promoting recycling—but events, admittedly largely unforeseen ones, have combined to render less effective, to put it mildly, some of the efforts made in good faith by Scottish local authorities.

Unless we get a clearer idea of the Government's long-term strategy, some local authorities in Scotland might withdraw from recycling altogether, and that would be a shame. I want to persuade the Government to consider their long-term strategy, and I hope that that will reassure people that their efforts will not be in vain, but will be supported as much as possible by central Government.

The history of recycling in my local authority, which is now Scottish Borders council, is instructive, and other authorities in Scotland will have similar stories. In the old local authority set-up, which came into effect in 1975, the four district councils in the Borders—Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale, Roxburgh and Berwickshire—undertook a series of independent and separate recycling projects according to their respective priorities and needs.

After the introduction of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Scottish Office's 1991 guidance on recycling, the councils were issued, as waste collection authorities, with a requirement to produce a recycling plan, which had the aim of recycling 25 per cent. of household waste by 2000, and everyone supported that as an objective; at the time, we were recycling only about 2 per cent. of household waste, and everyone recognised that we had to improve on that.

The former district councils, as waste collection authorities, did their best through 1991, 1993 and 1995 to co-ordinate among themselves within the resources available and to agree a strategy for the Borders. They secured useful assistance from the local enterprise company, which produced consultants' reports to inform the process, but they were constrained until 1995 by the fact that, for lack of resources, they could not integrate their services.

In the financial year 1995, the four authorities met again to consider the commissioning of a feasibility study into converting as a recycling centre a building that one of them had recently purchased. Each of the constituent authorities, and the local enterprise company, contributed towards another consultants' report. On 1 April 1996, under the reorganisation into unitary authorities, the four district councils were amalgamated with the former Borders regional council to form the Scottish Borders council.

In May 1996, the council took up the previous authorities' commitment to recycling, committing £200,000 from its capital budget and £100,000 from current revenue. Almost simultaneously with that ambitious and proper act, with which everyone was pleased—the sums added up, and the proposal made a lot of sense as an attempt to reach the target set by central Government—the paper merchants with whom the council dealt intimated that the price for mixed paper would drop from £35 to £3 a tonne.

In October 1995, the council had been receiving £82 a tonne for mixed paper; the wild fluctuations in market prices were certainly beyond the control of the local authorities. The council's financial estimates for the recycling centre project had been based on what was then considered the conservative figure of £30 a tonne. As if it was not bad enough having the bottom fall out of the market, the merchants then introduced a quota, and would purchase only 85 per cent. of the council's raw material. That immediately produced a glut of recovered material, and a huge backlog began to build up at depots in Galashiels and Hawick, which was another problem for the council.

In September 1996, the council reviewed its strategy, and committed additional resources in the form of extra manpower to separate cardboard from the mixed paper so that it could get a better price. That had a significant impact on the estimated total loss that the council faced, and still faces, of between £75,000 and £100,000 a year—a significant part of the council's cleansing services budget.

To make matters worse, in November 1996, the council was advised by the waste paper merchants that the price for card had reduced from £23 to £20 a tonne; worse still, the price for mixed paper had gone from £3 a tonne to nil: there was no value at all in the mixed paper that the council had collected for recycling.

It became clear at that stage that neighbouring authorities were experiencing similar problems. The local authorities all found that they had to pay the merchants to take the paper off their hands, because otherwise they would have had to use landfill sites to dispose of the paper, and pay £7 a tonne under the landfill tax. I know that Scottish Borders council and other local authorities will have written to the Scottish Office to highlight the problem and outline the difficulties that they may face in the future.

The councils are co-ordinating some activity through the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. A catalogue of unexpected financial blows caused by the collapse of the market has hit Scottish Borders council. It is also worried that not only local authorities but all commerce and industry has been taking account of the introduction of the landfill tax.

I entirely support the principle of the landfill tax, and understand what the Government are seeking to do. It makes much sense in principle. However, the draft EC directive on packaging waste, which requires producers, packagers and retailers to examine their operations and recycle packaging material, is compounding the glut of material on the market and leading to even lower prices. That explains the low prices that are being received for recovered goods. The draft directive came on stream only on 1 October, and aims for about 50 per cent. recycled packaging. That will have a major impact and make matters worse.

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

In recent months, Scottish Borders council and its sister authorities have been examining all sorts of alternative markets for recovered materials and for ways out of the mess. Few options are available. Like my next-door neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), I have always encouraged the council to go down the route that it has taken. It has always, rightly, had a high profile on environmental issues. Bluntly, unless central Government can do something, it may have to reconsider its environmental policy, which would be a shame.

I conclude with a few suggestions, some of which will be harder than others for central Government to consider. First, we must consider diverting some of the £280,000 that will be payable by Scottish Borders council in a full financial year in landfill tax to help with recycling and the sale of products to the market. Secondly, the Scottish Office should consider introducing a grant system whereby local authorities that meet their Scottish Office targets will receive funding to improve continually on those targets.

Thirdly, the Scottish Office could step in to set an intervention price for recovered materials. I know that that would be difficult, but it is essential that someone should co-ordinate the financial planning and get some order into the process of estimating what this policy and associated actions will cost local authorities. Fourthly, the Scottish Office should consider top-slicing and ring-fencing part of the council's capital allocation for environmental projects. That would allow each local authority to set its own priorities and targets within an allocated budget.

Fifthly, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency must quickly produce a waste strategy. I realise that it has existed only since the beginning of April, but it has been charged with producing a waste strategy. That should include recycling and waste minimisation, with realistic targets for recovering materials for recycling.

Sixthly, any target set by the Scottish Office, or any of its agencies such as SEPA, should be accompanied by the appropriate finance to enable local authorities to meet them. Finally, the Government, in the longer term and in the broadest sense—it cannot be done by the Scottish Office alone—should think about setting minimum targets for the recycled content of goods for sale, which could create a sensible long-term market for recovered products for recycling.

My local authority's experience, which is not unique, shows that, unless a more stable market is established in the supply of recovered materials to recyclers in Scotland, the Government's environmental strategy, with which I agree, will fail to achieve its desired results. The whole policy may founder on the need to implement emergency solutions. That is what Scottish Borders council faces. It is having to take drastic action and do things that it does not think are in the long-term interests of Borders council tax payers, or of the environment. It pleads with central Government to recognise its position, set up a long-term strategy, and come to its aid.

12.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): I congratulate the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on securing this important debate. I know that he does not regard the matter as a waste of time. That will be the full extent of my humour in this debate. I will not compete with the usual rubbish that comes from the hon. Gentleman. However, I appreciate the opportunity of dealing with the important subject of recycling targets for Scottish local authorities.

Recycling is part of the much wider issue of waste management generally. It might be helpful if I begin by setting out in broad terms the Government's policy on recycling and on waste management as a whole.

The Government recognise the importance of the waste management industry. Commercial, industrial and household waste account for around a quarter of the annual total of waste. We are especially aware of the scope to add value to much of the waste handled. The principal vehicles through which value can be added are re-use and recycling. We are therefore especially keen to encourage an approach to waste management that seeks opportunities to treat waste as a potentially valuable resource.

The Government subscribe to the idea of a broad waste management hierarchy. The options in such a hierarchy are reduction, re-use, recycling and recovery, and disposal. I wish to deal with the recycling and recovery option, which includes composting elements of the waste stream to make a usable product, and energy recovery from waste. In general, however, recycling is considered to be the recycling of specific materials. To be effective, it requires the active involvement of a wide range of parties, such as individual citizens, voluntary organisations, local authorities and industry.

The role of local authorities in the recycling process is the main focus of this debate. The hon. Gentleman mentioned that, in the 1990 White Paper on the environment, the Government set a target of recycling half of all household waste that can be recycled by 2000. It is estimated that that broadly equates to a target of 25 per cent. of all household waste.

In parallel, the Environmental Protection Act 1990 introduced a range of measures designed to create a more favourable climate for recycling. It introduced a scheme of recycling credits, and placed a requirement on all waste collection authorities to produce waste recycling plans. It also required waste disposal authorities to have regard to the desirability of including terms and conditions to maximise recycling in their waste disposal contracts.

The Government have also introduced the landfill tax—I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman welcomed that. It is the first stand-alone environmental tax to be introduced in the United Kingdom. It applies the "polluter pays" principle, and will promote a more sustainable approach to waste management. It will give waste producers a powerful incentive to cut the amount of waste that they send to landfill.

That has already led to the setting up of materials recovery facilities in Scotland where waste items that may be used in recycling are extracted from the waste recovered before it is sent to landfill. Another advantage is that we will be using income from the tax to reduce employers' national insurance contributions, thereby shifting taxation from jobs to pollution. I hope that that addresses one of the hon. Gentleman's points on using the funds received from the landfill tax.

The Government's policy on recycling is influenced by activity in the European Commission. The Commission proposes legislation on other measures designed to achieve recycling and recovery; the directive on packaging is an example. The Commission also influences recycling through its network of priority waste stream groups. The UK Government participate in those groups and seek to ensure that their outputs are consistent with Government policy.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the recycling targets, particularly in the context of local authorities and household waste. The Government's approach is to set challenging, but realistic, targets. For household waste, we have set a target of recycling half the recyclable element of all waste by the year 2000. That target equates broadly to a target of 25 per cent. of all household waste. As a general target, it is not binding on individual authorities.

We recognise that recycling is achieved more readily in some areas than in others—for example, because of geographical factors and population density. While authorities should set themselves a target of recycling 25 per cent. of all household waste, in practice those unable to achieve that target will be bolstered by those that are highly successful and surpass it.

Concerns have been expressed on behalf of Borders regional council, not only by the hon. Gentleman today, but by the council, in correspondence with the Scottish Office. As the hon. Gentleman said, other councils share those concerns. The particular problem appears to have arisen from the slump in demand for waste paper and the effect that that has had on prices. Borders council has estimated that, as a result, its income level could drop by up to £100,000 in the current year. That is also likely to be combined with a need to dispose of the surplus material collected to landfill.

It has therefore been suggested that the Government should set an intervention price for recycled materials, to encourage and support local authorities in achieving recycling targets and to defray costs. While I can understand the nature of the problems faced, I do not think that the Government should intervene to stabilise prices.

Recycling on a national, European and global scale should be allowed to stabilise through self-regulation. Intervention in the past—through the German packaging ordinance—caused significant problems in the market, and resulted in a flood of material being collected well beyond the capacity of the existing recycling plant. That pushed down the prices paid for such material throughout Europe, and I do not believe that we should seek to establish an intervention price mechanism.

It has also been suggested that the Customs and Excise should consider a short-term exemption from landfill tax for paper wastes that are required to be landfilled as a result of the market's inability to accept the material from suppliers. There are already some exemptions from that tax, but they generally reflect the fact that the material involved is not suitable for recycling. Those exemptions include waste dredged from ports, and the burial of domestic pets at pet cemeteries. Paper products, however, are eminently recyclable, and it is not sensible or appropriate to offer the exemptions sought. Were waste paper material not specifically separated from the waste stream, it would naturally be disposed of through landfill.

It has also been suggested that an investigation should be undertaken into the existing market for recyclable paper waste to establish whether and when material will continue to be required from suppliers such as local authorities. The demand for waste paper is a derived demand, as it is largely dependent on the demand for the final product. It is not uncommon for supply to exceed demand, and for prices to decline.

It is not for the Government to undertake the sort of investigation suggested. The implementation of the European Community's packaging directive will lead to a recovery of the recycled paper and cardboard market. In Britain, its implementation, through the producer responsibility for packaging waste scheme, is likely to have the longer-term effect of forcing a growth in recovery. The continuing high price of virgin pulp should also facilitate the recovery of the recycled product.

A further reason for optimism is the likely future demand for recycled paper from the far east. There is also potential for growth in the United Kingdom paper manufacturing capacity if the products are competitive. All those factors lead me to the conclusion that markets for recycled waste paper will become viable.

The hon. Gentleman raised two points involving the treatment of expenditure on recycling in the context of the overall local government finance framework. First, he suggested that spending on environmental projects might be ring-fenced. Secondly, he asked whether extra grant could be made available to authorities for the collection of waste for recycling. Both those points boil down either to an increase in public expenditure or to a reduction in local authority discretion.

It would in principle be possible to separate recycling expenditure from all other local authority expenditure, and it would be possible to introduce a specific grant scheme for such expenditure. However, if one or both of those courses were adopted without affecting existing local authority expenditure provision, that would be a straightforward addition to public expenditure. The hon. Gentleman knows only too well the overriding importance of keeping that expenditure under control.

Alternatively, the proposals could be implemented within existing expenditure provision. That would, however, reduce the expenditure provision and grant available for general distribution to authorities. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities is opposed to the introduction of new specific grants, because the process fetters local authorities' discretion in using the provision available to them. The Government are concerned that specific grant schemes introduce administrative costs, not only for the Government, but for local authorities. Those schemes use up resources that are better spent on service provision.

Having listed general points of principle, I must also ask the hon. Gentleman what other candidates he has in mind. Local authorities provide many valuable services to the community and there are many other cases where an argument could be made for some special treatment. At the end of that road lies a highly controlled and expensive centrally directed grant and expenditure system, in which much of the discretion would lie with central Government rather than local authorities.

[Mr. George Kynoch]

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman believes that that should happen, which is why he makes his devolution proposals for a central tax-raising parliament in Edinburgh that would dominate local authorities and take away many of their decision-making powers.

Mr. Kirkwood: Rubbish.

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman shouts, "Rubbish," continuing in the same spirit as he began the debate. But he advocates such a proposal, which would waste valuable resources. It would set up an unnecessary extra layer of bureaucracy, which would not help to solve the problem.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, which is drawing up a waste management strategy for Scotland. He asked when that would be available, and was honest enough to recognise that it is a new organisation, with many tasks. Clearly, an important element of its strategy will be recycling. That strategy is currently being prepared, and I accept the hon. Gentleman's call for it to be drawn up as quickly as possible—it will clearly be important.

Recycling needs to be seen in its wider context. The choice of the most appropriate waste management option must depend, to some degree, on the local circumstances that determine both the environmental and economic advantages and disadvantages of each option. To be credible in that context, recycling must be seen to be sustainable in both environmental and economic terms. However, the Government firmly believe that recycling must play an increasingly prominent part in the United Kingdom's waste management strategy.

The hon. Gentleman highlighted the difficulties faced by Borders council. I know that the same problems are being faced by many other councils. He talked about the variation of price over the past years. Current prices for waste paper are very low.

Mr. Kirkwood: They cannot go much lower.

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman is right. He talked about the prices a year or so ago—about one year ago, the price was about £100 per tonne, and in the past four to five years there have been major fluctuations in price. I believe that the market will return and prices will increase. I urge the council not to make hasty decisions that might undo some of the significant good that it is clearly trying to do in its waste strategy. I trust that it will look at the medium to longer-term prospects in the marketplace and continue to develop its proposals, with a view to ensuring that it is in a good position to take advantage of higher market prices when they return.

I thank the hon. Gentleman again for raising this subject today. I know that it is an important issue, which is recognised by councils throughout Scotland. I see that the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) is present, and I am sure that she, too, appreciates these problems. I believe that the Government's policy in respect of recycling and environmental control is absolutely right, and I welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire recognised that in his speech today.

Brewing Industry

1 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): This debate has almost become an annual event, thanks to the kindness of a succession of Speakers and Deputy Speakers. Although I have struck out—as our transatlantic cousins would say—on two previous annual Adjournment debates in which I raised the subject of the brewing industry in general and my brewing constituency of Burton in particular, I hope to score a sensational home run this time.

Much has been happening recently in the field of brewing, especially in Burton on Trent, where we have the finest breweries, in which Bass, Carlsberg-Tetley and Marston's manufacture their products and maintain the great Burton brewing tradition. Brewery workers, shareholders and, above all, the public are delighted that we have all-day opening and now Sunday afternoon opening as a result of the Government's sensible stripping away of overregulation.

The industry—whether manufacturing, retail, leisure or management—will now have the opportunity of attracting a new generation of young workers because we have lowered the age limit for working in bars, under proper supervision and with the obligation of further training. We welcome the lifting of restrictions and the reduction in tax on amusement machine prizes in pubs, which has resulted in the amusement machine industry in Burton being able to save itself and start to flourish once again.

Children certificates, although a good idea, have sadly attracted a low take-up of about only 3 per cent. That is largely due to regional inconsistencies between licensing boards. Some boards impose conditions—such as requiring nappy-changing facilities or low bar stools to avoid accidents—that are prohibitive and increase costs and so are not worth implementing, which is a shame.

Little beyond consultation has taken place in respect of the extra hour's opening on Friday or Saturday evenings, which might do more to defuse potential trouble from gangs of youths in town centres. The Bill on the stocks to limit under-age drinking in public places will be widely welcomed. Perhaps what we really need is a new, all-embracing licensing statute—the last one is now 32 years old and my commentary on it, which was written for *Current Law* in 1964, is that much out of date.

I turn now to the issue of the tied house—the partnership between brewer and publican whereby the publican can enter the brewing industry with only limited resources but can still flourish, in return for a commitment to sell a particular brewer's beers. Of course, that partnership, which could be exploitative, has been modified over the years to ensure that it is not, by giving the publican the rights to buy beer brands from other brewers, to choose his own supplier of wines, spirits and soft drinks, and to be protected by landlord and tenant legislation.

Some argue that the tie could restrict competition and keep beer prices high, as indeed it might; but the better view is that the abolition of the tie would be more likely to lead to the closure of many regional and smaller brewers, the increased domination of the market by fewer national brewers, higher prices and lower employment. Happily, the Government have adopted that view and my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary might want to reaffirm that today. Certainly, the industry welcomes the support from the Government in upholding the tie.

That support is especially welcome as the European Commission has shown an inclination to challenge the continuance of the exemption that we enjoy for the tie when it expires at the end of 1997. The Commission is challenging our arrangements for guest beers on the ground that our requirement that such beers should be cask conditioned discriminates against Euro-beers. That is, of course, complete nonsense because only 10 per cent. of British pubs have to have guest beers at all and we import properly £230 million-worth of Euro-beers a year, which is more than any other European country imports.

We have the most open beer market in Europe. If only it were possible to see British beers on sale in German pubs in the same way as German beers are sold in British pubs, we should all be thankful. The brewing industry welcomes the Government's robust defence in Europe of British brewing and British pubs. The British people have absolutely no wish to be pushed around by Brussels in the important matter of British beer.

The biggest problem affecting the industry today, as it has been whenever I have raised the issue over the past three or four years, is the level of beer duty. For that reason, I am delighted to see that my delightful hon. Friend the Economic Secretary will be answering the debate. The root of the problem is that we pay 30.7p per pint in duty on our beer, whereas the French pay 4.4p per pint—we pay over seven times as much. To a lesser extent, that gap exists in relation to all other European countries. Our beer duty is much greater than that of most other countries in Europe.

I concentrate on our trade with France because, France being nearer to us than other European countries, that is where most of the imports to this country come from. As a result of the differential in excise duty, imports from France have risen over the past three years from 400,000 pints to 1.1 million pints a day. That represents 4.5 per cent. of the United Kingdom beer market and £700 million a year in beer sales in British pubs, which is more than the sales of any UK regional brewer.

As a result of the price differential, a third of French beer is carried across the channel in hired vans and much is sold illegally at car-boot sales on council housing estates or door to door. The van trade in smuggled beer costs every pub in the country over £3,000 a year in lost beer sales and the Exchequer loses £250 million which, of course, the taxpayer has to make up. The number of vans crossing the channel by ferry, never mind those coming under the channel—such crossings have, sadly, temporarily stopped, but we did not know how many vans were involved anyway—is more than 64,000 a year, which is 175 a day. Each van of smuggled beer contains 1,500 pints, which is more than the weekly trade of a small community pub.

Surveillance by the Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association—which I still prefer to call "the brewers' society"—has identified vans from Dundee, Aberdeen, Truro, Bangor and Northern Ireland, so it is not only a London and south-east England trade.

Another aspect that should worry my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary, as well as the Chancellor's Euro-partners, is the fact that in 1994, Customs and Excise recorded UK beer exports to France of 57 million pints, but French customs recorded only 26 million pints entering France from the UK. Thirty-one million pints appear to have got lost. How? The likely explanation is that those exports existed only on paper. Why? To allow UK beer duty to be reclaimed as pretend sales to France. Those pretend exports are diverted to the UK market, and sold at full retail price as though UK duty and VAT has been paid on them. In that way, fraudsters make about £30 million a year. If the duty differential did not exist, those fraudsters would have to seek another way to cheat the Revenue.

What is the practical effect of that tax differential? My answer is that, as about 60 per cent. of cross-channel beer purchases replace what would otherwise be sold in British pubs and off-licences, about 10,000 pubs are likely to close in the next five years, and as a result 90,000 jobs will be lost in the UK in pubs, breweries and suppliers.

The Government must want to do something about that. What should they do? The industry's answer is to reduce excise duty to a level that removes the incentive for cross-border shopping and bootlegging. The reduction could be phased over five years, to reduce the rate to about 6.5p per pint by the year 2000. That would be a really good way to celebrate the millennium.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor could start with a cut of 4p in next week's Budget, so this debate is timely. That is why I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to the Speaker's Office for allowing me to initiate it, so that I can affect the intentions of the Chancellor in the Budget in a few days' time.

The Treasury will argue, as it always does, that cutting beer duty would reduce tax revenues, which would mean that £2 billion had to be found elsewhere, or that the public sector borrowing requirement had to be raised at a time when it needed to be reduced to make way for tax cuts. But I wonder what assessment the Treasury has actually made of the benefits of reducing tax.

Would not such a reduction inevitably lead to lower retail prices, therefore to more beer sales, and therefore to more tax revenue to offset part of the loss? Would it not inevitably boost jobs in pubs, breweries and related industries and generate higher profits and tax returns? Would it not inevitably lower the retail prices index and therefore pay settlements? Would not those factors prolong the fall of inflation, which the Government have achieved to their great credit, increase competitiveness, another of their achievements, increase economic growth, yet another of their successes, and produce a higher tax yield?

If my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary is unsure about that, I must report that Oxford Economic Forecasting, using the Treasury's economic model, can demonstrate that 6p off the duty on a pint of beer would have just those effects and would reduce inflation by 0.2 per cent. That organisation says that official estimates substantially overstate the true first-year cost of cutting beer duty, which would actually reduce the public sector borrowing requirement in its second year.

I have heard it said that such a reduction would only lead brewers to maintain the high beer price, but prices in UK pubs are already considerably cheaper than those in the bars of Europe. The wholesale price of beer in Britain has fallen by 10 per cent. in real terms in the past three years and 75 brewing and pub company members of the Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association have promised to pass on fully any reduction in beer duty in the coming Budget.

[Sir Ivan Lawrence]

Our brewing industry is one of the oldest and best of British industries. Directly and indirectly, it employs 750,000 people, even now. Our pubs are the finest in the world, although their number is steadily decreasing. Beer is the most popular alcoholic drink in Britain today, and we consume a fifth of the European Union total, spending more than £13 billion a year and raising more than £4.5 billion for the Treasury—a substantial proportion of which is raised in Burton upon Trent. That is the equivalent of 3p off income tax.

Brewing is a national institution, and my constituency is at its heart. For, as the great poet A. E. Housman wrote:

"Say for what were hop-yards meant,
Or why was Burton built on Trent?
Oh many a peer of England brews
Livelier liquor than the Muse,
And malt does more than Milton can
To justify God's ways to man."

We in Burton, we in the brewing industry in the country, ask for relief from unfair taxation. Is it really too much to ask?

1.16 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Angela Knight): I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) on being granted this debate—his annual Adjournment debate on a subject dear to his heart and to the heart of many Members of Parliament and many people in the country.

I have a sad confession to make. I am a cider drinker, not a beer drinker. I hope that that at least puts me in the category of the alcohol consumer, even if I do not consume the product that is brewed in my hon. and learned Friend's constituency.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: May I invite my hon. Friend to come to Burton-on-Trent soon and frequently, so that I may introduce her to the joys of Burton beer?

Mrs. Knight: My hon. and learned Friend has already tried to introduce me to the charms of Burton beer, not altogether successfully, but I will visit his constituency with pleasure. I believe it is well known that, when one is at least a quarter of an hour out of Burton on the A38, it is possible to smell the hops through the car windows, and that smell is a very tempting prospect.

The Government acknowledge the importance of the brewing industry. The industry contributes significantly to Government revenues, is a wealth creator in the economy generally and plays a socially cohesive role in pubs throughout the country. It is a considerable employer, directly and indirectly. As my hon. and learned Friend's contribution developed, I understood why the debate was timely.

No right hon. or hon. Member would expect me to divulge the Chancellor's Budget intentions—there are a few more days to wait—but I can say that the worries that my hon. and learned Friend expressed about the impact on brewers of cross-border shopping and smuggling are a very significant factor, which the Chancellor will take into account in reaching his decisions. He has done so for the past few years, and I know that he will do so again.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): May we be assured that the effects of the smuggling of tobacco will also be taken into account?

Mrs. Knight: I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. My right hon. and learned Friend will take into account all matters relating to cross-border smuggling when he reaches his decisions.

My hon. and learned Friend clearly set out some of the general aspects relating to the brewing industry in his opening remarks. In so doing he recognised the many recent changes to that industry. Community pubs are popular, but there have unfortunately been closures in some areas—for a number of reasons. The off-licence trade has, over the years, taken business away from the pubs, and in the off-sales sector supermarkets have increased trade at the expense of off-licence shops. Social trends and changes in drinking patterns have also played their part.

Over the past 30 years or so the main drink of practically every country in Europe has declined as a proportion of the whole: beer is down in beer-drinking countries and wine is down in wine-drinking countries. The industry has responded to these changes in consumption. At retail level, it has reassessed the pub structure to help it compete more successfully. We now have a variety of types of pub catering for particular groups—targeting a high-spending young clientele with theme bars, Irish bars and so on. Then there are community or country pubs, which have generally been made more attractive to customers by renovation and improved facilities—including the idea of the family pub catering for children.

I hear what my hon. and learned Friend says about the concerns regarding regional inconsistencies as between children's licences; we shall take a careful look at that.

I think that the family pub is an excellent idea. It means that I can take my children into the pub with me and they do not have to go through what I went through. My father used to leave me in the car in the car park with a fizzy orange drink which I did not like and, occasionally, a packet of crisps, while he stayed in the pub for what seemed like hours. I am sure that it was not really that long, but certainly, being able to take one's children into pubs leads to a more family-like atmosphere and is a great benefit. I note that my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth), the Government Whip, is nodding in agreement. He too has children who can benefit from these changes.

More people now drink at home because of drink-driving laws and because of home entertainments, but also because of significantly cheaper drinks being available in supermarkets. It is important to recognise and to cater for these long-term trends.

My hon. and learned Friend mentioned his concern about the guest beer provision. Even though I am not a beer drinker, I am well aware of the concerns that many have expressed on this matter. Indeed, the organisation CAMRA has brought it to many people's attention. The European Commission alleges that cask-conditioned beer is not produced in any significant quantity in other

member states, so the provision infringes article 30 of the treaty of Rome by discriminating against beer producers in other member states. The Government dispute that view.

To resolve the issue, on 11 October officials of the Department of Trade and Industry and of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food met Commission officials responsible for the free movement of goods in the single market, and representatives of the CBMC—the European brewers federation. They met to clarify the facts behind the dispute. It has been agreed that the CBMC will provide information on the extent of cask-conditioned beer production in other member states. I can assure my hon. and learned Friend that the United Kingdom is committed to resolving the issue. We do not believe that the guest beer provision breaches article 30 of the treaty.

Cross-border shopping affects not just the brewers; all involved in the production, distribution and retailing of alcoholic drinks are affected. On the other hand, the single market has brought a great number of benefits to UK business generally, to the extent that I notice that some brewers are reporting healthy sales on the continent.

Tax-induced cross-border shopping has clearly had an effect on the brewing industry, but since 1993 UK beer production has continued to increase, and most major and regional brewers report increased profits.

The drinks industry is working closely with Customs and Excise. It has been doing so for some time, first to agree the amount of personal imports of alcoholic drinks, and secondly to look at cross-border issues. The calculation that has been agreed is that in 1994 between 3 and 5 per cent. of the UK market was affected by the importation of alcoholic drinks. There is also general agreement on the overall amount of legitimate importation and smuggling. Agreement is still to be reached on how much of what is purchased cheaply abroad is in substitution for what would be bought here, and how much is additional consumption.

I can assure the House that we are not complacent. It is, however, important to keep the cross-border issue in proportion. Customs' own estimates of revenue lost—in duty and VAT—for legitimate cross-border shopping last year put the figure at £210 million for all alcoholic drinks. The share attributable to beer was £40 million. That assumes that half the trade is additional; but even if none of it was additional, the figures would not square with some of the scenarios about which we have read.

Customs conducted its own survey earlier this year to arrive at an estimate of revenue evaded by smuggling. That estimate provides a similar figure of £210 million for all alcoholic drinks, but with a much larger share attributable to beer, at £110 million. The actual loss of revenue will be less, since some of the smuggling is likely to represent additional consumption. Taking legitimate cross-border shopping and smuggling together, this represents less than 5 per cent. of the UK's beer consumption. The total tax collected on beer was over £4.7 billion last year.

That is not to say that we are doing nothing about the problem, or that Customs is not paying attention to this vital area. The top priority is to catch the smugglers.

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): Customs and Excise forecasts that by the year 2000 illegally imported alcoholic drinks will have doubled in quantity—a frightening statistic that will mean hundreds of millions of pounds in lost revenue. With Customs and Excise already stretched to the limit, does the Minister agree that action is needed now?

Mrs. Knight: I was just coming to that. What are we doing about the smuggling problem? Smuggling, dealing in smuggled goods and buying smuggled goods are all crimes. Customs has 300 staff employed on single market work, most of them directly involved in the anti-smuggling effort. Many, if not most, of them work at the ports, but some work inland providing intelligence. For instance, they are watching more closely the frequent crosser—but my hon. and learned Friend will excuse me if I do not go into the detail of what we are doing to stop smugglers. We do not want to give them notice of our intentions.

My hon. and learned Friend used the argument about harmonisation—that harmonising duties across the European Union would spell the end of smuggling as a problem. Some heavy costs are associated with that. A reduction of 10 per cent. in the duties on alcohol would result in a loss of £500 million to the Exchequer. To reduce our duties to French levels would cost roughly £3.5 billion. That is the sort of sum in question. We take every opportunity to press our case in the Commission. We want other countries to adopt a more practical attitude to alcohol duties.

It is true, as my hon. and learned Friend said, that the Treasury model has been used by some observers, but that model does not cater for the narrow, specific area of one industry, such as the brewing industry. We are discussing with those involved the reasons why their estimates are incorrect.

I conclude by reiterating that we take the matter extremely seriously. All the issues raised by my hon. and learned Friend will inform the decisions of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor with regard to the Budget that he will present to the House next week.

Causeway Hospital, Coleraine

1.30 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): I am sorry that I have had to raise this matter on the Floor of the House. I had hoped that tender documents for the hospital would already have been out, but they are not. I must therefore ask the Minister the reasons for the delay.

The debate on how best to provide good-quality medical and hospital treatment for Coleraine and the surrounding area has been going on for many years. I was told today that at least one person was brought over from England in 1952 to help to design the Coleraine hospital. For much of the time since then, there has been a deep division as to whether there should be one hospital or two—one at Coleraine and another at Ballymoney.

The matter was finally settled in favour of a single hospital at Coleraine, and the debate then began as to whether the existing site should be used, or whether it would be better to create the badly needed acute hospital in a brand new green-field location. The latter option was finally accepted, and a site was identified and purchased on the outskirts of Coleraine.

There is no question about the need for the provision of comprehensive hospital services in the Coleraine and North Antrim areas. In the catchment area, there is a population of about 110,000; that number doubles during the summer months, owing to the movement of many people to the north coast, which, as the House will know, is a major tourist attraction.

The present hospital is, to put it mildly, in a poor and deteriorating condition. For example, the out-patients department is still housed in wartime nissen huts. Such accommodation was never suitable for that purpose. The buildings, which were a second world war temporary construction, were originally designed to have a 10-year life. After the war, many such buildings were purchased by farmers and used to house farm animals, potatoes, turnips, chickens and everything else. All the animals, the farm produce have long since disappeared, but people are still using the huts. That is unacceptable.

The medical wards are prefabricated buildings, which are also long past their expected life span. In addition, many non-clinical services are long overdue for upgrading. The kitchens, the boiler plant and the mechanical and electrical services all need urgent work. When there is heavy rain, buckets are needed to catch the leaks. I understand that the mortuary is the most recent part of the hospital to come under assault.

Given the situation in the hospital, the board and the trust have been unwilling to spend money on major repairs in recent years, as they were aware that the new Causeway hospital was due to come into use—originally by 1999, but, according to a more recent estimate, by the end of 2000 at the latest.

The result is that, if the new hospital does not go ahead now, the necessary upgrading to meet the immediate requirements of the statutory authorities, which in the circumstances have been very fair to the hospital, are currently estimated to cost £5.3 million. To bring the facilities up to modern standards would cost £26 million, and we would still be left with an old hospital and worn-out buildings.

The site of the present hospital is a valuable one, right in the centre of Coleraine. No doubt it will bring a considerable sum to the coffers of the trust when it can be sold, as soon as the new hospital is built.

I am deeply concerned about the seemingly endless delays in starting building work, and my concern is shared by the entire community that is to be served by the new hospital.

The need for the hospital, its clinical profile and the estimated costs have been examined in detail no fewer than four times, and every time the need for the hospital was proven. The original option appraisal exercise took place in 1990. It was detailed and thorough, and concluded that the hospital must be built. There was a review in 1993 and early 1994 on new targets and throughput, and another review later in 1994 regarding a reduction of 4,000 sq m relating to capital charging. A further review was conducted later in 1994 and early 1995. To everyone's astonishment, a fourth review was called for during the current year, which ended with the same result. Such a detailed examination of a proposed new hospital is unprecedented.

It is clear from various letters that the questions raised by the Department were simply nit-picking, for the issues could and should all have been dealt with far more expeditiously. Two or three meetings at senior level with the board and the trust should have sorted out all the problems, without the endless inquiries that have been made.

The attitude of the Ministers involved in the saga has been plain. The right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), who originally gave approval in 1992, was forthright. He stated on 28 January 1992 that he had identified the funds and set out the time scale—he said that it was the only realistic time scale—and he expected the new hospital to open in 1999. He said that he hoped that his announcement would facilitate the process—he was referring to a process of rationalisation between the existing hospitals—by reassuring those who may have harboured doubts about the depth of the Government's commitment to the construction of the new Causeway hospital.

Baroness Denton, who was formerly in charge of this aspect of Northern Ireland's government and provision, gave a verbal assurance to Mr. Bill Tweed, the chief executive of the Causeway trust, on 15 July 1994. Her predecessor, Lord Arran, gave the same assurance on 22 December 1993—a lovely Christmas box, which has not yet been delivered. The present Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss), who I am glad to see on the Front Bench, renewed the assurance twice, on 18 January 1995 and again to me personally on 22 March 1995.

To date, £7 million has been spent on site purchase, the new laboratory, professional fees and considerable siteworks. I have a colour photograph showing the entire area—wonderful roads and entrance, but unfortunately no hospital. The difficult rationalisation process, which the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes considered a vital prerequisite in 1992, has been put into effect, not without some difficulty and resistance. It was driven through by the board and the trust on the basis that the new hospital was coming. I am told that the result of the final examination requested by the Health and Social

Services Executive has recently been delivered, and it shows that any redesign at this stage would be quite uneconomical.

The result of all this is that the trust is ready to go ahead once the Minister gives clearance for the project, and there is no reason why he should not do so, for, in the expenditure plans and priorities for Northern Ireland published in March this year, the sums required were set out on page 260, in table 9.29.

There is one error, in that the original year of completion was to be 1999, not 2000, as shown in the publication, and the sums already expended are slightly higher than those shown, but that is not unexpected. The provision for 1996-97 is just over £8 million, so in March this year the Government were still on course, and clearly expected the project to go to tender before the end of 1996. The documentation should have been finalised, and they should already be in the process of seeking tenders.

The estimates included sums for the redevelopment of the Royal Victoria and Altnagelvin hospitals. Altnagelvin was in the 1995 expenditure plans. The Royal Victoria was not, but the 1996 estimate shows that some £5 million will be spent in the relatively near future.

Given the history, it is perfectly clear why my constituents and I were sure that we could rely on the assurances that I have mentioned, plus private chats with Ministers down the years, all of which were given on behalf of the Government by so many Ministers on so many occasions. We were certain that the hospital would be built. But all the time, nagging concerns were expressed to me at various times by the professionals involved, by the medical establishment in the catchment area, by the local council and by members of the general public, who, naturally, were taking a keen interest in these matters.

I was concerned enough to write to the Minister on 20 September last. To be frank, his reply of 22 October thoroughly alarmed me, for there seemed a definite retreat from the assurances that were given. I did not like the resiling that I saw in the letter.

My alarm is rapidly turning to anger, for I am also aware that, despite the fact that approval for the Causeway hospital was given so long ago—at the beginning of 1992—the Royal Victoria, which received approval in May 1993 for its refurbishment, redevelopment or whatever, and Altnagelvin, which received approval for its major works in 1994, are at precisely the same stage as the Causeway hospital project. It is quite remarkable that they have managed to catch up, but it is not without significance that neither of those two projects ever had a comprehensive review at the beginning. They had in comparison a very casual examination of what was required and proposed. It is remarkable, and we need a fuller explanation.

The entire community wants to know why the Coleraine project has been subjected to these long delays, all of which lay within the Department. Much money has been spent. The site is ready. The design and commission teams are in place and are already paying for their rented accommodation. Frankly, they will run out of work if the project does not go ahead. They will soon have to be disbanded, and it will be difficult to get them back together again. The list of contractors has been selected.

The trust is ready to go, despite the obstacles put in its path. Many hoops were put up, and the trust and the board hopped neatly through them one after the other. The contractors met all the deadlines as soon as humanly possible, and much sooner than some persons would have liked. They are ready to roll.

The perception of the community that would be served by the hospital, particularly in Coleraine, is that the Causeway is the victim of a sustained campaign of discrimination. Only a clear commitment to go ahead now would remove that perception from the minds of my constituents.

1.44 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): This is a very serious matter for the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) and for myself. I remind the Minister that large sums were spent through the Province on a promise that the Waveney hospital in Ballymena would be the main acute hospital in the area. The tragedy is that, with the closing of the hospital in Ballycastle and the rundown of the hospital in Ballymena, there is currently no acute service hospital nearer than Antrim for my constituents. If the Causeway hospital does not go ahead, all the people, from as far north as Ballycastle, will have to travel to Antrim.

This is a very serious matter, and all of us are seriously concerned about it. We thought that we had it resolved by the promise of a new hospital in the hon. Gentleman's constituency but on the periphery of my own. It was called the Causeway because it was to serve both communities. As the hon. Gentleman said, Minister after Minister—the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), the Earl of Arran, Baroness Denton and the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss), who will reply today—gave us assurances on two occasions.

There are serious questions that the Minister must answer today. First, why all the reviews? It seems strange that one review is carried out in September 1994 and another in October 1994. Why? No other new hospital in our country has had such treatment. The hon. Gentleman is right: people are saying that there is discrimination in this case. This has not happened in the other new hospitals built. An appraisal was carried out in 1995. In June 1996, there was yet another. Why all these appraisals, when it was decided that the hospital was needed and that it would be built?

Then, of course, we have the fact that the Causeway hospital development group met monthly for four years. It has had 49 meetings. Now there is a question mark over the whole affair. What about the promises made to the medical staff, and the rationalisation that was necessary for the configuration of the new hospital?

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The hon. Gentleman speaks of rationalisation. Does he recall that, between 1982 and 1986, the Northern Ireland Assembly agreed that rationalisation should proceed? At that time, as Chairman of the Finance Committee, I asked whether slippage money could be used for rationalisation, and millions were returned to the Treasury.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I recall that very well, because it was a matter about which people were urgently concerned. Promises were made to staff, particularly consultant medical staff, on the radical changes that were to take place because of the new hospital.

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

Will the Minister confirm that the Causeway hospital site cost £0.85 million, the Causeway laboratory £1.89 million, the advanced siteworks £1.18 million and the main project £2.4 million? What is the estimated cost of the total upgrading of the present facilities if the delay is lengthened? Has the commissioning team been stood down? Have officers' leases ended? If the design team is stood down, will its members seek compensation? What is the position on putting out tenders? When will tenders be issued?

I know that the Minister is concerned about the matter—he is not unsympathetic. However, we must answer to our constituents, and we need answers today at the Dispatch Box.

1.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Malcolm Moss): I am grateful to the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) for the opportunity to outline the Government's record and position in relation to the Causeway hospital. I recognise that the matter is close to his heart. Similarly, I know that the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) is committed to the project. Perhaps more importantly, I am aware of the concerns of the local population from the range of correspondence which has come to me recently.

As the hon. Members helpfully explained, the campaign for a new hospital serving the Causeway area has been active for many years. In 1976, the Northern health and social services board set out its strategy for the development of acute hospital services. It was based on the provision of two modern hospitals to rationalise and concentrate services from a range of small dispersed units which were in poor condition and hopelessly ill equipped to meet the needs of modern clinical practice and standards of care.

A new area hospital at Antrim is to serve primarily the southern part of the board area, and the northern end of the board area is to be served by a new hospital in the Coleraine area, which would enable rationalisation of the Coleraine, Route, Robinson and Dalriada hospitals.

As hon. Members are aware, the first element of the strategy was finally achieved—after a slight delay—with the opening of the Antrim area hospital by the Secretary of State in 1993. The development of services in Causeway was planned to follow upon completion of the new Antrim hospital. From 1988 on, the Northern board appointed management consultants to look at the options. The then unit management and Coopers and Lybrand were involved, and, after considerable analysis, in December 1991 the Government approved and accepted the option to build a new hospital on a green-field site at Lodge road, Coleraine.

Shortly after that, in January 1992, my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), announced the timetable for the project. It was envisaged that detailed planning and design would commence in 1994, with the major construction phase beginning in 1997 and the project to be completed by 2000. The speed with which the result of the option appraisal was translated into a programme of action with supporting funding reflected the Government's priority for, and commitment to, the project.

Over the past four years, the local population has seen that commitment demonstrated by physical investment. The proposed site was purchased at a cost of £0.85 million, and the first and essential stage of the development, the new area laboratory, was built on the site at a cost of £2.7 million. It became operational in 1994. Those investments, plus expenditure on landscaping and initial design fees, bring the total spend to date to £8.35 million. I hope that hon. Members will agree that that represents a considerable investment already in the light of pressures on public expenditure and the competing investment priorities.

At the same time, it is important to ensure that the original case for such major investment remains valid over the necessarily lengthy planning period. The acute sector has seen many changes in the past decade: productivity has increased significantly, and clinical practice has seen the expansion of day surgery. Hon. Members may recall that, in 1993, the Public Accounts Committee examined acute hospital provision in Northern Ireland. In the memorandum of reply to the Committee, my Department gave a commitment that all proposals for major investment would be kept under constant review and the underlying assumptions would be tested before any final decisions were taken.

As the Minister responsible for health and personal social services in Northern Ireland, I am keen to endorse that commitment to ensure that what is built at Causeway and elsewhere is demonstrably what is needed, and no more than that. Therefore, at my request, earlier this year the health and social services executive asked the Causeway trust to review the case supporting the investment. In the light of the new regional strategy that I issued in July, I was particularly anxious to ensure that investment in a new hospital in Coleraine was consistent with the vision for acute hospital services set out in that strategy. The trust was therefore asked to ensure that the investment was acceptable and affordable to the principal purchaser, the Northern board.

I am pleased to record that the trust tackled that exercise in a rigorous and comprehensive manner, submitting a detailed review carried out by Coopers and Lybrand. The Causeway trust board has acted with commendable professionalism, urgency and diligence, and I take this opportunity to thank the chairman, the chief executive and board members for their co-operation throughout.

As a result, the executive identified a number of issues as requiring clarification by the trust and the board. The trust again dealt with them expeditiously and, as a result, the executive wrote to the trust on 5 November to inform it that the case for the investment had been revalidated. The executive advised the trust that, because of the additional costs involved with a redesign, it would not be economic—I confirm the hon. Gentleman's earlier comments—to seek a reduction in the project design.

As hon. Members are probably aware, the Government have reaffirmed the need for the new Causeway hospital to provide a locus for the acute services to the local population in the next century. The matter now rests with me in terms of a decision on the next stage of the project. Hon. Members will be aware of the pressures on public expenditure in general. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will soon announce decisions on public expenditure in Northern Ireland following the Chancellor's Budget statement. Hon. Members will

recognise the added pressures on public funds in Northern Ireland caused by the ending of the IRA ceasefire and the consequences of the summer's unrest.

The projected investment at Causeway—about £40 million—is significant. As Minister responsible for health and personal social services, I have a responsibility to ensure that such investment decisions are affordable and deserve the top priority with other pressures on my programme. I shall look at those issues once the Secretary of State has taken his decision, and I hope to make a statement before long.

To sum up, I believe that the Government have an impressive record of achievement already with the Causeway hospital project. The investment appraisal was approved quickly and a firm timetable was set out. Significant public funds have been made available and allowed preliminary investment on the site. We have ensured that the project remains tight, affordable and thus value for money for the taxpayer. The timetable set out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes has largely been adhered to.

I recognise the local population's wish that we move on to the last major phase, but I ask hon. Members in the Chamber today for some forbearance over the present delay. I am likely to face difficult decisions over health spending next year, and decisions on Causeway must be part of that process, not taken outside it or ahead of it.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the Minister assure the House that he will meet Causeway trust members and converse with them?

Mr. Moss: I have already given that assurance to the hon. Gentleman and to the hon. Member for East Londonderry. I am more than happy to meet Causeway trust members. They have not asked for a meeting at this stage, but my door is always open to any trust board members who wish to talk to me.

In determining the way forward, I assure hon. Members that I hear and understand their concerns and those of their constituents. They can be sure that I shall give them due weight in the weeks ahead.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

NEW WRIT

For Barnsley, East, in the room of the hon. Terry Patchett, deceased.—[*Mr. Dewar.*]

Scottish Borders Council (Jim Clark Memorial Rally) Order Confirmation Bill

Mr. Secretary Forsyth presented a Bill to confirm a Provisional Order under section 7 of the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, relating to Scottish Borders Council: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Tuesday 26 November and to be printed. [Bill 13.]

Western Isles Council (Berneray Causeway) Order Confirmation Bill

Mr. Secretary Forsyth presented a Bill to confirm a Provisional Order under section 7 of the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, relating to Western Isles Council: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Tuesday 26 November and to be printed. [Bill 14.]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Inward Investment

1. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what investment from abroad has been attracted to Scotland in 1996 to date. [3459]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): Record levels of investment have been attracted to Scotland in 1996.

Mr. Dykes: What conclusion does my hon. Friend draw from those record levels, from the forthcoming announcement about the massive Hyundai project and from the general outlook for economic activity and tax matters?

Mr. Kynoch: I think that my hon. Friend meant the recent and not the forthcoming announcement about Hyundai. The Hyundai project has already been announced, and it is excellent news for the Dunfermline area. There will be 2,000 new jobs and inward investment of £2.4 billion, which is the largest ever in Europe.

My hon. Friend is right—companies come to Scotland because it is a competitive, low-tax country. The Opposition's proposals will be bad for inward investment: whether it be their spending pledges, which it is reckoned will increase taxation by 9p, the extra 3p that they intend to impose through a tartan tax, their proposals for a uniform business rate, which will be an extra tax on business, or their trade tax. We would not continue to attract the record levels of investment that we currently enjoy under the Government.

Mr. Maxton: Does the Minister seriously expect the House to believe that investors who come to Scotland do not know full well that Labour will win the next election, and that we shall establish a Scottish Parliament with tax-raising powers? If that is so, why are they not put off coming?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman should give inward investors a little more credit than that. They possibly look a little further ahead. They do not believe that the Labour party will win the next general election: they believe that the Government, with their beneficial policies for business and for the economy in Scotland, will continue for many years to come.

Sir Hector Monro: On the matter of incentives, does my hon. Friend agree that it is right to bring it home to the House and to Scotland that no one would want to come to a country where income tax was 9p higher, the tartan tax was 3p and where there was an unknown trade tax, all of which have been proposed by Labour? Those proposals must be the biggest disincentive for anyone to come to Scotland that there has ever been.

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend is right. Businesses are concerned about their competitiveness. All businesses must exist in a highly competitive marketplace, so anything that makes them less competitive is bad. The social chapter, the minimum wage and the taxes to which my right hon. Friend referred, and which I mentioned earlier, would be bad for competitiveness, and thus bad for business, and would make inward investors think twice before they came to Scotland.

Mr. Wallace: The Minister has talked, not unreasonably, about the jobs that we already secure from inward investment. How does he feel about the threat of what might be described as predatory investment by Norwegian salmon farming companies in Scotland, which might buy up Scottish salmon farms? Those farms are made less viable by the currently plummeting price of salmon.

I accept that the Minister's colleagues in the Scottish Office appear to have been batting for the salmon farming industry, but their view does not seem to be shared throughout Government. What prospect can be offered to the salmon farmers of a minimum import price in the near future, so that they can try to secure the home-based Scottish industry that is so vital?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Salmon farming is an important industry, particularly in the highlands and islands. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is already discussing the matter with colleagues, and my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson)—the Minister responsible for fisheries—is going to Norway on Monday to discuss issues relating to the salmon farming industry.

Mr. Gallie: What proportion of inward investment comes into Scotland through private finance initiatives? If the PFI relating to the new Scottish air traffic control centre were accepted, would that not increase inward investment further?

Mr. Kynoch: As a firm advocate on behalf of both Ayrshire and Prestwick, my hon. Friend knows only too well that we have recently had significant success with Rohr's investment in Prestwick. We continue to hold discussions with British Aerospace in Prestwick, to ensure that it is given all the support that it needs to develop further. I know that my hon. Friend is also a firm advocate of the air traffic control centre at Prestwick, and I am sure that my colleagues in the Department of Transport are well aware of his concerns.

Mr. Hood: Is it not the case that, although the Government have 11 per cent. support in Scotland and trail Labour by over 20 per cent. in the United Kingdom, we still have an increase in inward investment? Could it be that those who have invested in Scotland consider their investment worth while because of the impending Labour Government and Scottish Parliament?

Mr. Kynoch: I must tell the hon. Gentleman to dream on. As I have said, there is no doubt that businesses that look to Europe and the United Kingdom for investment potential take into account the competitive circumstances that they can enjoy in Scotland. Clearly, anything that is likely to put that in jeopardy—such as higher taxation in Scotland, which is an inevitable consequence of the

Opposition's policies—would reduce competitiveness, and make businesses think twice before coming to Scotland.

Mr. Beggs: Does the Minister recognise that the prosperity of Dumfries and Galloway has a considerable impact on the Northern Ireland economy? Can he assure us that the region is given equal prominence as a suitable location for new inward investment in Scotland?

Mr. Kynoch: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that all areas are given equal attention by Locate in Scotland when it comes to inward investment. The decision where to locate is made by inward investors themselves, and they will inevitably consider their individual circumstances in judging where they will find the skilled labour force that they may be seeking, and where they will secure the best access to their marketplace or suppliers. Nevertheless, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that no part of Scotland is not promoted by Locate in Scotland; the whole of Scotland is promoted, and long may that continue.

A96 Fochabers Bypass

2. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will make an announcement on the route of the A96 Fochabers bypass. [3460]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I have been reading the hon. Lady's local newspaper, the *Northern Scot*. I see that she has been saying one or two rude things about the Government, and me in particular, with regard to this subject.

Mr. Canavan: That is what she is paid for.

Mr. Forsyth: I am not sure that that is what she is paid for. She is paid to make representations on behalf of her constituents, which she does with considerable vigour. I am delighted to tell her that I shall be publishing a line of route for the bypass, and that I have now decided on a northern route for the town.

Mrs. Ewing: I welcome the Secretary of State's decision, but why has the Scottish Office taken some seven months to analyse the 700 responses from my constituents in connection with the Fochabers bypass? In the Scottish Office, there has been a bottleneck as tight as the traffic bottleneck in Fochabers. When will the work commence, because what is important is not just his decision but the commencement? After 20 years of campaigning for the bypass, why cannot we have it before the millennium?

Mr. Forsyth: All that I can say to the hon. Lady is that officials' advice on the matter reached me this morning and I took the decision immediately so that I could give her the answer that no doubt accounts for the smile on her face.

On the construction of the project, the hon. Lady will know that officials will now have to work up design proposals, in consultation with the local community. We shall then have to publish the draft orders. I assure her that that will be done as speedily as possible.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the news of the Fochabers bypass is welcome and that it involves much public money? Does he recognise that the new hospital in Elgin, costing about £30 million—

Madam Speaker: Order. It is a good try, but the question is on the Fochabers bypass. I know Scotland rather better than the hon. Gentleman thinks that I do. Let us stay with the Fochabers bypass.

Mr. Walker: My point is directly linked to the Fochabers bypass because the funds available for the bypass would not be available under Scottish National party proposals to renationalise the bus industry, Skye bridge and Railtrack. Does that not demonstrate the SNP's fairy tale economics?

Mr. Forsyth: There is a link between Dr. Gray's hospital in Elgin and the bypass in so far as one leads to the other if one travels in the right direction. Both are projects for which the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) has campaigned. I have had the pleasure over the years of being able to announce approval for both projects because we are part of the United Kingdom and of the Union and therefore are able to afford that.

Industry (Taxation)

3. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from the business community about the effect of the level of taxation on Scottish industry. [3461]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish business community is opposed to Labour's tartan tax and to its proposals to introduce a new trade tax by abolishing the uniform business rate.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the proposals to allow local authorities to set the business rate would sink businesses without trace? They would be faced with enormous tax burdens. That would mean that jobs would be lost and businesses would go under. It would add to the burdens of Labour's proposals for a tartan tax increase of 3p in the pound and for an income tax increase of 9p in the pound. Does he agree that there is only one thing for businesses to do: stay with the Conservatives because we shall keep jobs for all?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend and commend to her the document "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans", which was published by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary today and which shows that, in addition to the 9p on income tax, we would have to pay 3p in tartan tax and of course the trade tax, which would be levied as a result of abolition of the uniform business rate. The news of consolation from the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) is that the business rate increases would be limited to increases imposed by

Labour councils on the council tax payer, so, in Glasgow last year, business rates would have increased by 19 per cent. That is meant to be the consolation.

Mr. McKelvey: Does the Secretary of State not know that we all know his expertise in taxation? Will he tell the truth and say that, by placing VAT on fuel—a move to which he was a party, and for which he voted—the Government created the most devastating tax that Scotland has had to face since the infamous poll tax? How will he advise old-age pensioners on the issue of whether they should eat or heat?

Madam Speaker: Order. The question deals with the level of taxation on Scottish industry. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will make his question pertinent to it.

Mr. McKelvey: You are absolutely right, Madam Speaker; I got carried away. Is the Secretary of State aware that the business rate paid by industry is only one of the injuries that it has received, and that, this winter, many businesses will lose staff who have to take time off because they have caught colds, because the VAT placed on their rates has created a cold climate in an even colder climate?

Mr. Forsyth: That is the first time that the Government have been blamed for the cold climate. On the hon. Gentleman's concern about the effect of taxation on energy prices, he might like to have a word with his own Front Benchers about the windfall tax, which will do precisely what he is complaining about. As for his point on businesses and jobs, we are currently committing about half a billion pounds a year to maintaining the uniform business rate. Labour would throw away the rate and the competitive advantage that it provides for Scottish business, and fund the extravagant proposals made by Labour-controlled local government, which, in the current year, amount almost to an extra half a billion pounds of expenditure.

Mr. Stewart: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Scottish industry should be extremely concerned about the prospect of a Scottish Parliament that would have unlimited powers to pass legislation on the level of business rates in Scotland? Does he agree that Scottish industry should, as a matter of the highest priority, endeavour to establish precisely the Labour party's policies on those matters by consulting the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson)?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend on where policy appears to be made, and on the need for concern about the effects of a tax-raising Parliament on the business community in Scotland. Not only would we have to pay a tartan tax, which would mean a 15 per cent. increase in the starting rate of income tax, but funding for our vital services would be put at risk, with all the consequences that that would have for Scottish industry. Furthermore, we would have increases in the business rate, which would destroy jobs, investment and prosperity in Scotland.

Sir David Steel: Is the Secretary of State aware that, following the death of the General Franco, there was, in 1977, an exactly similar debate in Spain? Many Spanish businesses doubted the wisdom of setting up the Catalan Parliament, and the "poncho peseta" phrase stood in for the "tartan tax". Is he aware that, if he were now to go to Barcelona, he would not find anyone against the Catalan Parliament, because it has been such a success politically, economically and culturally? Why does he think that Edinburgh would do less well?

Mr. Forsyth: I am surprised at the right hon. Gentleman. If he has made a study of the Catalan Parliament—which may explain why we do not see so much of him here—he will know that the Catalan Parliament is a net contributor to Spain, and that the Catalan economy contributes to the rest of Spain. The situation is the other way round in Scotland. That is why a Scottish Parliament risks our vital public services and why I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman is still supporting the Constitutional Convention—whereas Lord Ewing, a former Labour Minister, at least had the dignity to resign in disgust at the shambles created by the hon. Member for Hamilton.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if there were to be an independent Scotland or a Scottish Parliament with tax-raising powers, Scottish industry would have a much higher burden of taxation, which would destroy jobs and inward investment, and the unemployment rate in Scotland would reach the level that it is in Spain—as recommended by the former leader of the Liberal party?

Mr. Forsyth: If we had an independent Scotland, we would have a budget deficit problem of about £8.1 billion, and the future of Scottish industry would be an academic consideration.

Mr. George Robertson: Is there not something of a brazen, brass-neck cheek about the inventor of the poll tax accusing anybody else on the subject of taxation? At the last election, the Secretary of State's party told Scotland, including Scottish industrialists, that it would reduce taxation year on year, but it has put up taxes 22 times—the equivalent of 7p on the standard rate of income tax—since then. His party has put VAT on heating. The cold and windy days in Scotland make that the Tory heating tax, and it is felt deeply by everybody. The Government cannot tell the truth about their own tax plans, so why should they expect anybody to believe the lies that they tell about Labour's tax plans?

Mr. Forsyth: There was a moment's frisson when I saw the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) sitting in the hon. Gentleman's place and I thought that we might be in for some serious opposition. If the hon. Gentleman finds what we have to say about Labour's tax plans incredible, perhaps he would like to look at a document that has been produced by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary, "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans"—

Mr. Hood: It is lies.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman says that it is lies, yet all of it is in the words of Opposition spokesmen.

Further Education Colleges

5. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many further education colleges in Scotland were allocated less money by him in this financial year than last year; and what factors underlay this decision. [3463]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): Twenty-one, according to the formula.

Mr. Worthington: I thought that 22 out of the 43 colleges had received less money this year than they did last year. Given that the Minister is budgeting for further education in Scotland to get less money next year, he is saying that, no matter how many colleges work well and attract more students, at least half of them will receive less money next year. What sense is there in such a Government policy?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is totally mistaken. No spending plans on how much will be allocated to further education have yet been decided. He stands up and says that there will be less money, but he does not have a clue how much money will be allocated next year. All I can say is that we have increased spending on further education colleges every year since incorporation in 1993.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Does my hon. Friend believe that, if we went down the route of taking away child benefit from those aged 16 to 18 who hope to go on to further education, it may mean that a number of people who might have stayed on to do A-levels at school will be dissuaded from doing so and will have to go out and find a job? There will therefore be fewer people going on to further education.

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend is right. The teenage tax proposed by the Labour party would hit Scots young people harder, since more young people stay on in school in Scotland than in any other part of the United Kingdom. Labour's tax is uniquely designed to hit the young people and families of Scotland.

Mrs. Fyfe: If the Minister is going to encourage his colleagues from southern constituencies to come to Scottish questions, could he first give them a crash course in Scottish education and other matters? How does he expect Scottish industry to thrive if there is not sufficient expenditure on further education courses?

Mr. Robertson: Here we have yet another spending pledge from the Labour party. The hon. Lady seems to forget that we now have more students, studying more courses and getting more and better qualifications in our colleges under record funding from the Government. She would do the further education sector in Scotland a great service if she for once—just once—recognised that.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Do the Scottish further education colleges use the same formula as those in England and Wales? If they do not, do they get less than those in England and Wales, or more?

Mr. Robertson: Further education colleges in Scotland are, of course, funded more than equivalent colleges in England. The funding formula that we introduced last year, after full consultation with the colleges, is rewarding student activity and efficiency in colleges, which is surely the right way forward.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: Does the Minister recall that, during an exchange in Scottish questions just before the summer recess, he agreed that a meeting with my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) and myself concerning the funding problems that are being encountered by various colleges, such as Inverness and Thurso, in the north would be appropriate? Given that final decisions have not been taken, but those colleges are, like others—as the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) said—likely to have future funding problems, could we have that meeting before spending decisions are taken?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is right. I offered a meeting to him and the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan). They have never got back to me to arrange that meeting. Of course I should be delighted to see them.

Mrs. Liddell: Why does the Minister deny that, in 1995, the Government cut £11 million from their previous plans for funding further education in Scotland? Those cuts are not sustainable without redundancies and a diminution in the quality and range of teaching in Scottish further education colleges. Will he accept that his inability to protect Scottish education from the narrow dogma of the right hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) is undermining Scotland's economic future?

Mr. Robertson: Only the hon. Lady could turn an 11 per cent. increase into a cut. Today of all days, she has suggested that the £233 million that we spent last year on further education is not enough. If she was being honest, she would have said how much she would spend. Would she spend another £50 million? Another £60 million? Another £70 million? For us to have an informed debate on further education funding, she must come up with her figures. I stand by what we have done. The hon. Lady is not in a position to respond to me during Question Time, but I give her notice that I shall write to her this afternoon. I hope that she will be able to write back, telling me how much more than our £233 million she would put in were she in my position.

Expenditure and Taxation Levels

6. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received on (a) expenditure and (b) taxation levels in Scotland. [3464]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have received a number of representations on expenditure and taxation levels in Scotland.

Mr. Field: Is it not a fact that the cut in duty has brought a warm cheer to the Scotch whisky industry of Scotland—more than adequate compensation for a cool climate? Is it not also a fact that the Scottish people get an excellent bargain from the Government and the British taxpayer? They have more Members of Parliament per head and more expenditure per head than the people of

the Isle of Wight, yet they still mutter and moan into their sporrans. If we had that level of expenditure per head on the Isle of Wight, we would do an island fling.

Mr. Forsyth: It is certainly true that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer broke with the tradition of 100 years in last year's Budget by cutting the duty on whisky for the first time. I hope that that splendid new tradition will be continued.

My hon. Friend is right to say that Scotland enjoys considerably higher levels of public expenditure. I believe that that is a benefit for the Union. Despite what I am sometimes tempted to think when looking at Opposition Members, I also believe that it is a benefit for Scotland to have proportionately more Members of Parliament. In addition, we enjoy the office of Secretary of State—a Cabinet post that provides an important strong voice for Scotland. All those factors—the higher expenditure level, the representation at Westminster and the role of the Secretary of State—would be destroyed by Labour's plans for a tax-raising Parliament.

Mr. Graham: Is the Secretary of State aware of the acute crisis in local authorities caused by his Government's savage cuts? Next year, a catastrophic unemployment rate will escalate among local authority workers who provide the services for our people. There will be further cuts in home help and in all local authority services because of the Government. Local government services will once again be decimated.

Madam Speaker: I hope that the Minister heard a question. I did not. Perhaps he would respond anyway.

Mr. Forsyth: I prepared an answer earlier. I think that the hon. Gentleman's question was about the need for more local authority expenditure. I draw his attention to Glasgow. Last year, I gave Glasgow an additional £15 million in aggregated external finance and was criticised by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson). We now find that the council is unsure of how many social workers it employs in its social work department. It does not know the number. It has also overspent its budget by £3.5 million. Local authority expenditure in Scotland is 30 per cent. higher than in England. Grant support from central Government is 44 per cent. higher. The problem with local authorities in Scotland is that they are run by the Labour party, not that they are underfunded by the Government.

Mr. Gallie: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that half of the United Kingdom regional aid budget was spent in Scotland last year? If a Scottish Parliament were established, does he believe that that would continue?

Mr. Forsyth: I do not believe that it would continue. It is hard enough maintaining that level of expenditure at present, given our voice in the Cabinet, our representation, and our ability to make our case where the decisions on funding would continue to be made even if we had a Scottish Parliament. I do not believe that that level would be sustained, nor do I believe that the additional advantage of the £3.8 billion of expenditure on public services in Scotland, which we enjoy, would continue.

Mr. Salmond: Does the Secretary of State accept that, even using his Department's methodology, and allowing for Scotland's share of UK public borrowing and, of course, our share of our own natural resources, the fiscal surplus of Scotland in the past 17 years amounts to £80 billion, or £16,000 a head for every man, woman and child in the country? Can we arrange a seminar at which those facts could be explained to hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), which is seeking independence I understand, so that they can answer this simple question: if they really think that Scotland is subsidised, why are they so anxious to hang on to us?

Mr. Forsyth: Because, unlike the hon. Gentleman, we are Unionists and because we place the interests of our country before narrow nationalism, which would impoverish Scotland and damage our public services. The hon. Gentleman is on to an idea, however. We should have a seminar, and he and the hon. Members for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) could come along. We could study Scotland's budget and hear where the Opposition parties' priorities would lie. I would be happy to organise that—let us do it next week.

Mr. McAllion: If expenditure levels are so much higher in Scotland, can the Secretary of State explain why the Government recently allocated £25 million to 13 towns in England to pay for the rough sleepers initiative when not a penny was allocated to any town or city in Scotland? That is an absolute disgrace, especially when we remember that surveys north and south of the border have shown that more people are sleeping rough in one small part of Glasgow city centre than in any of the 13 towns to which the Government handed those millions of pounds. Why does the right hon. Gentleman not fight in the Cabinet for Glasgow and other Scottish towns? If he is not prepared to fight, he should go.

Mr. Forsyth: It is absurd for the hon. Gentleman to compare housing expenditure in England and in Scotland. He should look at what is happening in his city and throughout Scotland—levels of expenditure on housing in Scotland are way above those in England. In so far as we have given—

Mr. McAllion: I asked about the rough sleepers initiative.

Mr. Forsyth: Well, we have put the money into creating homes for people to live in, and we have a record of improvement, refurbishment and creating new housing in Scotland to which no Labour Government could hold a candle.

NHS (Scotland)

7. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairmen of health boards to discuss the current situation of the NHS in Scotland. [3465]

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I meet chairmen of health boards regularly to discuss matters of current interest.

Mr. Ross: When the Minister of State next meets the chairmen of health boards, does he intend to have the

same discussion as Scottish Office officials recently had with the chief executives of trust hospitals? They impressed on them that they and their trusts should be concerned not about improving the health care of the people for whom they are responsible, but about implementing the promises in the last Tory manifesto up to the next general election.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We are determined to improve the health standards of everyone in Scotland. That was our commitment, and we are going to do it. The chief subject that I discussed with the chairmen of health boards was the need to ensure that contingency arrangements are put in place to meet peaks in demand throughout the winter. It is perfectly proper for a Government to implement the manifesto commitments that they gave the people before a general election.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the current situation in the health service in Scotland is affected substantially by the way in which councils have used health service funds for care in the community? The inspection in Tayside revealed that it was costing more than £200 per head per week to keep individuals in local authority homes and that that was causing bed blocking in the health service, costing many millions of pounds.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My hon. Friend raises a matter of great relevance. The inspection showed that the three authorities could achieve long-term savings totalling between £3 million and £6 million a year by making more use of independent sector care and that local authority homes did not offer better standards of care overall than the independent sector.

Local authorities will in future be required to make available to the public and to councillors full information on the comparative cost to authorities of buying residential care and providing it in council-run homes. It cost the three authorities an average of £200 more per person per week to provide care for an older person in their homes than to buy care from the independent sector. Authorities should comply with the spirit of the directions issued by the Scottish Office, which would be greatly to the benefit of older people in Scotland.

Mr. Canavan: Will the Minister discuss with the chairmen the declining number of national health service beds in certain specialties? For example, is he aware that the Forth Valley health board is planning to reduce the number of NHS beds for frail elderly people to such an extent that, by 2000, there will be a national health service bed for less than 0.6 per cent. of the elderly population?

On psychiatric services, will the Minister comment on the speech made last night by the respected judge, Lady Cosgrove, in which she said that there will be more suicides and murders unless we provide more national health service beds for psychiatric patients who are unable to cope in the community?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have visited Lochgreen hospital in the hon. Gentleman's constituency; the closure of that hospital will not take place until all the other packages of care and accommodation are firmly in place. Two new developments in Falkirk, the Carrongrove and ANS nursing homes, are due to be completed by early 1997 and will provide an additional 168 places for the frail and elderly. Extensions to existing nursing homes in Bo'ness, Falkirk and Airth—

Mr. Canavan: That is irrelevant: those are private nursing homes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This is in the hon. Gentleman's constituency; what happens on his doorstep is extremely relevant. There will be a further 67 places in Bo'ness, Falkirk and Airth, which is more new places than are required to accommodate the patients at Lochgreen hospital. We believe strongly that sufficient places must be made available to meet any peaks in demand, and I have no doubt that the NHS will give priority in future to the most pressing needs.

Sir Irvine Patnick: Does my right hon. Friend prefer the Prime Minister's statement that he will increase national health spending above the rate of inflation year on year to the way in which the Opposition parties would plunder the funds to pay for their excesses, with more councillors and more of the things that they deem to be needed?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have given a commitment to increase national health service funding year on year in real terms. The official Opposition have failed to match that, and the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) is very welcome to take the matter up with his Front-Bench colleagues, who have not given as strong a commitment to the national health service as we have.

Mr. Chisholm: Have not the Government any sense of shame or constitutional propriety? They try to involve top civil servants and health service managers in promoting Tory party policy, and blame Labour local authorities for the bed blocking that Government policy has caused. The Government are behaving in a desperate and improper fashion, while waiting lists are at record levels, beds are being closed in spite of the looming winter bed crisis, £170 million has been spent each year on the bureaucracy of the internal market in Scotland and two-tierism is undermining the fundamental principles of the NHS—with the open support of the Minister as expressed earlier this month. Is it any wonder that people all over Scotland are saying, with sadness and anger, that enough is enough?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It will not do for the hon. Gentleman to throw mud at the national health service. I have not the slightest doubt that it is the best in the world and we are determined that it should remain so. It now treats far more patients and has far shorter waiting lists. The inspectors operate independently; the facts that accompanied their very thorough report cannot be denied. If certain people do not like that, it is because they do not necessarily like having to be efficient, but efficiency is in the best interests of patient care.

Non-custodial Penalties

8. **Mr. Clifton–Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the introduction of more severe non–custodial penalties for convicted offenders. [3466]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We have made it possible for community service orders to be longer and tougher, and we shall introduce electronic tagging, subject to the House approving the necessary legislation.

Mr. Clifton–Brown: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the latter point. Has he noted the inconsistency between Labour's Front-Bench Scottish spokesmen, who oppose these proposals, and its senior Front-Bench spokesmen south of the border, who purport to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime?

Mr. Forsyth: I have noticed a certain inconsistency, which I assume is due to the length of the line of communication from Islington. It is extraordinary that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) should suggest that the Labour party wants to decide the bedtime of the nation's children, while the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) continues to oppose our proposals for electronic tagging, which is a useful way of dealing with football hooligans and others who cause disturbances on the streets of our towns and cities, especially on weekends and Friday evenings.

Mr. Galbraith: Why does the Secretary of State always talk tough on crime but act so weakly on handgun control? Why has he left a glaring loophole through which people can retain ownership of .22 handguns? Does he not realise that the people of Scotland are outraged? That is unfinished business and the next Labour Government will legislate to abolish all handguns.

Mr. Forsyth: I do not think that there is going to be another Labour Government. If there is, they will presumably be better at getting their people to turn up than the Labour Opposition have been. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman did not want to mislead the House, but people will not be able to have handguns of any calibre outside registered gun clubs. I have made it absolutely clear that the toughest standards of security will be applied. The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) was among those who voted for the handgun ban, but only weeks before the vote he assured his constituents that Labour's policy was to allow people to continue to use handguns in clubs. It is impossible not to conclude that Labour has sought to exploit the issue for party political purposes. I think that that is disgraceful.

Mr. Waterson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that tougher sentences, whether custodial or non-custodial, are overwhelmingly popular with the law-abiding public and that the only people who are out of step on the issue are Opposition Members and a few misguided senior judges?

Mr. Forsyth: I would never criticise the judges. It is for the judges to implement the law and to exercise their judgment in doing so in the courts; it is for Parliament to decide what the law should be. I observe only that on every measure, and perhaps most spectacularly on our proposals to allow a right of appeal by the Crown against lenient sentences imposed by judges, the Opposition have voted against the interests of those who want the country to be seen to be tough on crime and to give the judges the powers that they need to ensure that the punishment fits the crime.

Mr. Davidson: Does the Minister accept that it is not only the toughness, but the certainty, of the sentence that acts as a deterrent? Is he, like me, concerned about delays between the date of an individual being charged by the police and the date on which he or she is to appear in court? Delay undermines the system's credibility if people who are known to have been caught and charged by the police are free to continue offending until they appear in court. Will the Secretary of State publish the figures for delays between charging and sentencing? Will he undertake to do something about those delays?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with the hon. Gentleman: there are unacceptable delays in the system. The legal aid system partly encourages delay, which is one reason why we want to reform it. The hon. Gentleman is right to mention the importance of the punishment being administered as soon as possible and to say that people who have committed serious crimes should not be allowed to be released into the community. We have been concerned about bail. I shall certainly consider the hon. Gentleman's suggestion about publishing the length of the delays. I got into some trouble with, and encountered opposition from, the hon. Gentleman's colleagues when I said that we would publish the sentencing practices of the sheriff courts—there are inexplicable and wide variations between them. The hon. Gentleman pinpoints a matter that causes considerable concern in communities the length and breadth of Scotland.

Mr. George Robertson: We are prepared to consider and assist on non-custodial penalties in the Scottish legal system where they are appropriate. The Government's reputation and credibility on law and order was seriously damaged on Monday night when they politicised the handgun issue with a whipped vote in the House. Has the Secretary of State read in today's paper the comments of the dean of the Faculty of Advocates—Scotland's top QC—who says that, in the general fight against crime in Scotland, a total ban on handguns is appropriate and necessary? There is still time to reconsider the Firearms (Amendment) Bill before it becomes the law of the land. Is it not possible for the Government to try to rescue their reputation by allowing Conservative Members to follow their judgment and conscience rather than the diktat of the Whips Office?

Mr. Forsyth: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Cabinet reached a view on handguns that went way beyond Lord Cullen's recommendations and what Opposition parties were saying prior to knowing the Government's views. If I believed that a ban on handguns was the right policy for my party—I understand that that is the hon. Gentleman's position—I would do everything possible to ensure that there was a whipped vote to achieve that end. The hon. Gentleman could not even get his colleagues into the Lobby to support his party's policy. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's colleagues were in the Lobby supporting a policy that

went way beyond what the hon. Gentleman was prepared to describe as his policy until he knew what the Government were going to do.

Health Service Reforms

9. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet the chairman of Grampian health board to discuss health service reforms. [3467]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I meet all health board chairmen regularly to discuss all matters of current interest.

Mr. Bruce: When the Minister next meets the chairman of Grampian health board, will he tell him from me that there is considerable welcome for one development in recent years: the growing role of community hospitals across Grampian region? The Minister will soon receive an application for the upgrading of Inverurie community hospital, whose GPs are total fundholders. As the Minister has already agreed to the upgrading of Peterhead and Turriff hospitals, which have total fundholding practices, will he give a positive response to the application from Inverurie, which is an important community hospital in the heart of my constituency?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The health board is currently considering proposals for investment in Inverurie hospital by the Grampian Health Care NHS trust. The board has not reached any final decisions on the purchasing requirements, but I shall certainly draw the hon. Gentleman's comments to its attention.

Mr. Watson: When the Minister meets the Grampian health board chairman, will he discuss the problems associated with the private finance initiative which, as a result of health service reforms, is virtually the only source of capital projects in the health service in Scotland? Will he draw to the chairman's attention the difficulties associated with the Victoria infirmary in my constituency, where no funding short of that initiative is available? Will he clarify the attitude of the Scottish Office, which was previously so enthusiastic about the PFI, to the Treasury Committee's report on the initiative early this year? That report said that £3 billion of potential spending in Scotland was at risk owing to private companies using the PFI to boost their own profits rather than serving the public good. Will he give a commitment that the health service in Scotland will be funded on the basis of what people, not private companies, need?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: That goes without saying, but I can say that the private finance initiative will greatly increase resources for the NHS and make public sector funds go much further. We are taking forward a wide range of different projects, including the one to which the hon. Gentleman referred. We have had great success with some smaller projects. For example, Ferryfield in Edinburgh is a small project, but it saves the health board £100,000 a year, which is to the board's great benefit. We believe that, gradually, the sums will run into many millions of pounds—some £70 million has already been committed to PFI projects—and that, before many years have passed, they will be hundreds of millions and eventually thousands of millions. However, the plans must first be put firmly in place and they must add up and balance. We must be certain that they will provide the required outcome. Every detail has to be thought through to its final conclusion.

Government Expenditure

10. **Mr. Stephen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was total Government expenditure in Scotland as a percentage of the United Kingdom total in 1994–95; and what was Scotland's relative share. [3468]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Scotland had 8.8 per cent. of the UK population and received 10.2 per cent. of funding in 1994-95.

Mr. Stephen: Do not those figures show that the people of Scotland are getting an extremely good deal from this Conservative Government? Is it not time that Scottish Opposition Members stopped their ritual moaning and groaning and acknowledged the enormous benefits that membership of the United Kingdom provides to their constituents?

Mr. Forsyth: The people of England are getting a very good deal from Scotland being part of the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend is right to point out that there is a substantial financial benefit to Scotland from the present constitutional arrangements which, with that substantial funding, all the Opposition parties would put in jeopardy. Given the size of the additional funding that we enjoy, tampering with it would put at risk many vulnerable groups who depend on health care and local government and other services.

Mr. Foulkes: Is the Secretary of State aware that that budget includes £13 million of capital expenditure for the East Ayrshire hospital? Why has he not given that project the go-ahead? Why has he delayed it for two months so that a private finance initiative bid can be considered? Why has he continued to delay while that private finance initiative bid is allowed to be adjusted? Something fishy is going on—what is it?

Mr. Forsyth: What is going on is that we are trying to provide a hospital for the hon. Gentleman's constituents. I am sorry that he is so concerned that we are doing everything we can to bring in private finance so that more projects can go ahead in the health service in Scotland—on which we have a record of which we are proud.

Mr. Stewart: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of his biggest blocks of expenditure in Scotland is local authority expenditure? Why is local authority expenditure in Scotland so much greater than that in England or Wales?

Mr. Forsyth: Because we have so many more Labour councils and because of the waste and profligacy in local government that has to be seen to be believed. The additional grant is necessary because those Labour councils are so bad at collecting council tax. Uncollected

council tax and community charge adds up to three quarters of a billion pounds—money that could be used for front-line services. It is money that Labour councils, in the main, have refused to collect.

Mr. Macdonald: Does the Secretary of State agree that Government expenditure in Scotland will inevitably have to increase if the salmon industry collapses, with the loss of thousands of jobs? Will he confirm that he favours a minimum import price, but that he has been overruled by the Treasury and the Chancellor, who prefer the purity of free market ideology to protecting Scotland's jobs?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman usually accuses me of being the supporter of free market ideology. *[Interruption.]* This is a serious issue. The farmed salmon industry is vital to Scotland. Many thousands of jobs depend on it.

The salmon price has fallen dramatically. One way to deal with the matter in the short term is to ask the Community to introduce a minimum import price. In the longer term, we need to tackle the root of the problem—Norwegian dumping into the market. The Commission is at present investigating those matters with a view to reporting in early spring.

I know the hon. Gentleman's anxieties about the matter. I am in discussion with my colleagues about it. I will continue that discussion in the hope of being as supportive as I can to the industry, which is vital to the highlands and to the hon. Gentleman's constituency in the islands.

Local Government Finance

11. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss local government finances. [3469]

Mr. Kynoch: The next meeting is scheduled for 17 January.

Mr. Marshall: Does the Minister agree that the present formula for distributing revenue support grant takes little or no account of the costs, services and needs associated with business communities in city areas? Is he aware that Glasgow city council collects slightly more than £200 million per annum in non-domestic rates but receives slightly more than £150 million in return—a loss of £50 million per annum to the city? What does the Minister intend to do about such blatant discrimination against the major cities in Scotland?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman is only too well aware that the distribution of funds to local authorities in Scotland is discussed at the distribution committee of the Scottish Office and COSLA. The formulae used for that distribution have been in place since 1985, and are discussed and fine tuned each year. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman asks the City of Glasgow why it still has not collected about £200 million of community charge and council tax. If it did, that might solve its problems more quickly.

Mr. Norman Hogg: Is it not the case that the Government already know what next year's local government funding will be? Is the Minister not aware of the grave situation that was created for local government last year, which placed very many services in danger and put cultural activities at risk? Will the Minister give an assurance that nothing like that will happen this year, that the settlement will not be used for electioneering purposes and that local government will not be asked to bear the cost of cuts designed to assist the Government's other tax strategies?

Mr. Kynoch: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that, last year, an increase of about 3.6 per cent. was given to local authorities throughout Scotland from central taxation. That enabled most authorities to increase their budget by a minimum of 3 per cent. over the previous year; some were able to increase it by 4 per cent.

The hon. Gentleman should address his comments to Labour councillors on his local council and ensure that they obtain the best value for money for their council tax payers so that more services are provided at better value. At present, they do not even know how many people they employ, as was witnessed by the joint staffing watch survey carried out jointly with COSLA. I believe that we shall continue to treat local authorities fairly throughout Scotland, provided that they act responsibly on behalf of taxpayers.

Government Expenditure

12. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current total Government expenditure per capita in Scotland. [3470]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Identifiable expenditure per head was £4,505 in Scotland—about 25 per cent. higher than in England.

Mr. Evans: If that lot over there get their way on devolution, will us English stop subsidising their way of life? When the tartan tax takes over, will we police Hadrian's wall to stop the marauding Scots coming into England, which will by then be a tax haven—so they will all want to come here? Furthermore, if we have devolution, can my right hon. Friend assure me that Scottish Members of Parliament will have no authority in this House at all?

Mr. Forsyth: I think that is a fair summary of the arguments against the Labour party's case for a tax-raising Parliament. My hon. Friend put it very eloquently.

Mr. McFall: Can the Secretary of State explain why a formula that is widely seen to be fair by all United Kingdom parties should now be seen as unfair in the context of a Scottish Parliament? In a country where, after 17 years of Conservative rule, one in five households have no one in work, as many as 1 million elderly people are paying the penalty of the Tory VAT increases on heating, and thousands of young people are leaving school for a no-hope jobless future, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is nothing less than shameful that a politically vacuous, illiterate and ignorant English Back Bencher should suggest that we in Scotland cannot manage our expenditure with a Scottish Parliament?

Mr. Forsyth: I dare say my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) has done more for wealth

creation than has the hon. Gentleman. If he is puzzled as to why the formula would no longer continue, the answer is that he cannot expect this House to continue to vote 25 per cent. more money for the Scots than for hon. Members' own constituents in England if the hon. Gentleman and his party have their way and there is a tax-raising Parliament in Scotland. It is because the hon. Gentleman and his party wish to gerrymander our constitution that they place that funding at risk. The people who would suffer would not be the hon. Gentleman and his cronies in the Labour party; it would be the honourable, ordinary people of Scotland who would find their services jeopardised.

Zaire

3.30 pm

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North) (*by private notice*): To ask the Minister of State for the Armed Forces if he will make a statement on the plans for the deployment of British forces to Zaire.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): The House will recall the statement made last Thursday by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. At that time, fighting in eastern Zaire was reported to have intensified. There were estimates that hundreds of thousands of refugees were at risk, and that the death toll was likely to escalate rapidly.

In the face of a potential humanitarian tragedy, my right hon. Friend made it plain that the United Kingdom was ready to play its part in the temporary multinational force for which United Nations Security Council resolution 1078 had called. But he also emphasised the absolute necessity to establish clear objectives for any force dispatched to the region, and announced that we had authorised a reconnaissance party led by Brigadier Jonathan Thomson, the chief of joint rapid deployment force operations, to travel to Zaire to establish in greater detail what the situation was on the ground. The House will wish to be aware that the party was vastly assisted by Her Majesty's ambassador to Rwanda, Miss Kay Oliver, and her team, who have done a remarkable job in the past few days and deserve great credit.

The recce party made its report yesterday. It confirmed that the return of refugees from north Kivu to Rwanda was largely complete and that the situation in the area around Goma had therefore eased substantially.

It is possible that last week's decision to mount a multinational force was instrumental in persuading the Hutu militia to flee and the refugees to return home. By contrast, the position in the area to the south of Lake Kivu remains confused and complex. The precise whereabouts and condition of a large number of refugees are unclear. There remains a critical shortage of information on what is happening in the south Kivu region, which makes it extremely difficult for military planners and humanitarian agencies alike to assess what action is needed; although it is clear in any event that humanitarian support will be needed in Rwanda as refugees return to their homes.

The House should know that my right hon. Friend has authorised the deployment of a Canberra photo-reconnaissance aircraft with its attendant support to the area, to assist in establishing a clearer picture. Until we have more detailed information, we shall be in no position to take sensible decisions on how best to help.

In the mean time, we are continuing to plan a range of options with our potential partners in a multinational force. We also continue to keep in close touch with the humanitarian agencies and we are monitoring the situation closely as it develops. My noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has announced this afternoon that a further £10 million will be provided to help to meet needs in Rwanda and the great lakes region. That brings our total contribution for Rwanda and its refugees to more than £18 million in 1996.

The option of deploying a multinational force to south Kivu remains open. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear last week that the Government were ready to take prompt and effective action to help to overcome the crisis. That remains the case.

In the light of the changed circumstances, we are urgently assessing the direction of events and consulting our partners further before final decisions are taken. The House will, I know, understand and agree, and will wish to be reassured that we are making absolutely certain that any contribution, whether military, political or in the form of aid, properly meets the needs of the people in the region.

Dr. Reid: I thank the Minister and welcome the additional £10 million that has been made available. Like the entire House, I welcome the fact that hundreds of thousands of refugees have now reached comparative, albeit temporary, safety.

We recognise the fluidity of the situation. The nature of the deployment of any British troops may have to be subject to revision in the light of the professional evaluation of the reconnaissance party.

We welcome the Government's efforts to enhance our information-gathering capability by sending a Canberra aircraft to assess the situation.

When does the Minister expect to be able to give a detailed response to the findings of the recce party? Does he recognise that hundreds of thousands of refugees are still stranded in eastern Zaire and that it is not clear what the Hutu militias are planning—possibly a regrouping and reinforcement of their positions?

Can the Minister confirm reports that members of the British team sent to eastern Zaire were unable to visit parts of the area that they wished to see because they were barred by the Hutu militia, and that they had to make observations instead from the high ground in Rwanda? Does he accept that there remain formidable problems of logistics and organisation, even for the refugees who have reached comparative safety, and that those are problems for which military skills and logistical operations may be of great assistance?

Although we appreciate that the situation is fluid, I am sure that the House would be grateful if the Minister told us his current thinking about the number of troops to be sent. In that context, what are the implications for Britain of America's announcement that it is to send fewer than 1,000 support troops? What communications has he had with our western allies in assessing the situation?

Finally, will the Minister accept the Opposition's assurance that we remain supportive in principle, should the decision be taken to deploy our troops in the light of the reconnaissance report? We ask, however, for an assurance that any final decision will be subject to a fuller statement from the Minister, so that the House can examine the details of the mission objectives, command structures and any rules of engagement that might be appropriate.

Mr. Soames: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks and for his support throughout.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the reconnaissance party. I can confirm that members of the reconnaissance party were well received wherever they went and that they were able to make assessments on the ground and see all that they needed to see. They did not have any trouble of the kind that the hon. Gentleman feared. They could see from where they were all that they needed to see. They have made a full and detailed report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and to Ministers and the chiefs.

The hon. Gentleman's point about logistics and the difficulty of delivering aid is well taken. Clearly, if a force of any size were deployed under the present circumstances, one of the principal requirements would be the ability to deliver aid and to resolve the associated logistical problems.

The hon. Gentleman asked about our current thinking on the number of troops. That depends on our assessment of the situation and our absolute requirement to clarify the situation on the ground, but it seems that the problem is not as serious as we originally thought. The House will realise that although the position in the north is considerably eased, there is no such assurance about conditions in the south. We are anxiously seeking information about those refugees.

The hon. Gentleman will realise that the liaison between our western allies and the United States is extremely close and on-going. A team from our permanent joint headquarters will deploy to Stuttgart, to EUCOM, for the planning meeting that starts tomorrow, and I hope that we shall, towards the end of the week, have a clearer idea of the situation on the ground and of the configuration of forces that we shall need. I reassure the House, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State did last week, that there will be no question of going without a clear mission, proper command and control and everything else about which the House expressed concern.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): Most people will acknowledge that the Ministry of Defence has responded to a very complex and confused situation in eastern Zaire and Rwanda with commendable clarity and resolve, unlike some other countries. It is just as well that our new joint rapid deployment force was operational and not committed elsewhere.

We also applaud the readiness with which 10 African states have come forward to volunteer troops to a combined joint task force. Should not we be giving African countries and, perhaps, countries in other continents, help in setting up planning cells and command structures, so that if such emergencies arise again, as they are bound to do, at least they will be able to help themselves rather than being forced to rely on outside help, no matter how ready other countries are to assist?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I think that the House will agree that Her Majesty's Government responded as one would expect them to in the circumstances of impending potential humanitarian catastrophe, by taking steps to ensure that Britain would be able to make its rightful contribution. It is lucky that the JRDF was not deployed elsewhere. It has also turned out to be an extraordinary stroke of good fortune that it was up and configured. The new permanent joint headquarters has played a notable role in the planning of the operation.

I wholly endorse what my hon. Friend said about African countries and peacekeeping operations. As he knows, Britain has had a number of short-term training teams deployed in Africa over time. They have played a notable role. Indeed, Britain played a great role in the conference on peacekeeping in Africa, in Zimbabwe, last year. I agree that African countries need to be able to play a bigger part in resolving their own difficulties, which would be greatly to their advantage.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): May I, on behalf of my colleagues, give a wholehearted welcome to the Minister's statement? I remind him that two years ago I visited British troops who were in Kigali as part of the UN force, and General Dalliaire, who was in charge of the UN operation—indeed everybody—said that if only the international community had been able to send troops three months earlier, we might have been able to have a police operation, which would have prevented the exodus of refugees into Zaire.

Learning from that experience, will the Minister emphasise the part of his statement where he talked about liaising with humanitarian agencies? Does he also recognise that we may never get a perfect military plan, because if we wait for that, we shall wait for ever? Will he therefore respond to the cries for help if a police operation needs to be mounted?

Mr. Soames: The right hon. Gentleman makes a good point. There is clearly no point sitting around just waiting for things to happen, because there is no such thing as the perfect military plan. There will always be a degree of risk. I accept, as will everyone in the Ministry of Defence, what the right hon. Gentleman said. Timing is extremely important. There are lessons that we learn after each deployment, and the one raised by the right hon. Gentleman is one such.

However, it is plain that it would be unwise to send troops into a situation such as that which appears to be developing in Zaire and elsewhere without a clear exposition of exactly where the problem is. A week ago, we were looking at sending troops on a basis that it now seems will not be required. It is important that we assess properly the scale and shape of what we need, and then we shall be ready to go at short notice. Indeed, I can confirm to the House that all the troops placed on a shorter notice to move by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State earlier in the week remain on that short notice.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): This time last week, a delegation from the House was at the United Nations and we were able to watch the informal meeting of permanent representatives of the Security Council discuss the matter in some depth. I pay tribute to our permanent representative, Sir John Weston, who played a leading part in the resolution passed by the United Nations Security Council last week.

Everyone is tremendously relieved that it has not proved necessary to send the sort of force envisaged in the resolution and that many refugees have now returned to Rwanda. Does my hon. Friend foresee the possibility of sending troops to Rwanda—obviously with that country's blessing—to assist with humanitarian and reconstruction work? I think particularly of the Royal Engineers which, as my hon. Friend knows, has a major establishment in my constituency.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I am glad that he was at the United Nations when those matters were discussed. He will know—as should the House—of the formidable job done by Sir John Weston and his team on our behalf at the United Nations. My hon. Friend is right: if it came to providing purely humanitarian assistance in Rwanda, the Royal Engineers might play an important role, as could the logisticians. I pay tribute to the Royal Engineers, whose home base is in my hon.

[Mr. Soames]

Friend's constituency. They are deployed throughout the world and are extremely overworked. I do not know where we would be without them.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The Canadians offered to take the lead in the mission, but do they remain as enthusiastic as they were? What has President Bizimungu of Rwanda said to the British Government or to Ambassador Kay Oliver? Would he welcome such forces?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the interest that he has shown in the matter and for the courteous way in which he has kept in touch with my office. He is right to ask whether troops would be welcome, as plainly we will not invade the place. We are talking about a humanitarian operation and it is important that British and multinational troops are welcomed wherever they go, with a view to carrying out the mission for which they were sent.

The hon. Gentleman knows that both the Americans and the Canadians are now reassessing—as we are—the need for the kind of deployment that we considered before the vast exodus took place from the north. That plainly changes the situation. I know that the hon. Gentleman would not want us to move without careful thought and assessment of the situation on the ground, so that we go in, first, welcome and, secondly, able and configured to do the job required to save lives. We must not get caught in some awful mix-up.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): I welcome my hon. Friend's undertaking that we will not deploy troops without the approval of the Governments concerned. That is a great relief.

Does my hon. Friend accept that the Secretary of State's statement to the House last week was based on incorrect information? Clearly, 20,000 refugees were not dying every day or every week—many of them would have been left in the camps if that were the case. Will he assure the House that in future he will take less notice of scare stories circulated in the media, by aid agencies or by others with a vested interest?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend should recall the exact remarks of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who said that refugees in the northern part of the country could be the victims of a potential humanitarian catastrophe. Her Majesty's Government received that information not just from the non-governmental organisations but from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The information was substantiated by our sources and it was clear then that the British Government and other Governments of the civilised world should prepare to take part in a relief operation. It would be a shameful thing for Britain, among all countries, even to contemplate standing apart if something terrible happened.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Unlike the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), I welcome wholeheartedly the fact that the British Government are willing to take part in another United Nations-sponsored humanitarian operation. I fear that such a scenario will occur time and again in this increasingly unstable world. Is the Minister aware that our scaled-down armed forces are already seriously overstretched, with commitments in Northern Ireland, Bosnia and elsewhere? Is it not the responsibility of the Government and of the House to give our armed forces sufficient resources and manpower for the task that we want them to undertake?

Mr. Soames: I am probably more aware than anyone in the House of how busy our armed forces are, and I agree with the hon. Gentleman's sentiment, although it was rather intemperately expressed. I know that his heart is in the right place: he is a keen member of the armed forces parliamentary scheme. I assure him that whatever such an operation may have required, and however busy our forces may have been—they are busy at present—that would not have prevented us from conducting the proposed operation.

An overstretch undoubtedly exists, but it was not a factor in this operation. The joint rapid deployment force was created to hold troops available for such operations, so that they could go rapidly wherever we need them, either to defend our interests or to help other people.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): The House will welcome the increased aid for refugee women and children. What assurance can my hon. Friend give us that that aid will not be used to feed warring fighters, whose side may not be doing so well? Is there not evidence from the pictures that we have seen that many of the young men among the refugees are former fighters who, refreshed by overseas aid, can carry on fighting at the next opportunity?

Mr. Soames: It is difficult to discriminate in the television pictures between one person and another as they trudge from point A to point B. I am sure that some of the guilty are among those people. That does not alter the fact that we are beholden to help where we can. I hope that the House will agree that we should add this new money to the already substantial help that we are giving to Rwanda. Of the new £10 million commitment, £1.25 million has already been allocated to the World Food Programme, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the British non-governmental organisations to address immediate needs in eastern Zaire and Rwanda.

However critical people are of overseas aid—there are legitimate arguments for and against—the House should recognise that the Overseas Development Administration in this country has a golden and shining record. Our aid is outstandingly well spent in every respect.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): I am sure that the Minister spoke for the whole House when he said that our first priority was to deliver humanitarian aid to refugees, to help them to return home. He referred to the difficulties of sending troops to Zaire. I am sure that he will agree that the humanitarian aid agencies are heroically delivering services under difficult circumstances. Until the Minister is able to make a statement on the deployment of troops, what practical assistance can the Government offer those agencies, to ensure that the aid gets through?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for those words, and I join him in his warm tribute to the humanitarian agencies. They do so much all over the

world, not just in times of crisis when they are on everyone's television screens, but every day when they help people in desperate circumstances.

Until we have people on the ground, the Government are plainly not able to assist in dispatching aid. I am sure that aid agencies will warmly welcome the announcement that I made this afternoon and which my noble Friend Baroness Chalker, the Minister for Overseas Development, made on additional aid to humanitarian agencies.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): I thank my hon. Friend for his judicious and reassuring statement. He has forgotten none of the lessons of his formative military years, that time spent in reconnaissance is never wasted. Can he reassure the House that there will be no diminution of the Royal Air Force's aerial reconnaissance capability, which is so important in this emergency, because it enables us to assess need over huge areas of ground and extremities of range? On the logistics of the emergency, can he tell us whether the Government comprehend the RAF's requirement for a heavy lift capability, such as the C17 aircraft, which can carry huge amounts of kit at rapid speeds to any emergency hot spot around the globe?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he said. He is right about the age-old adage in volume 1 of "Staff Duties in the Field", which tells us that time spent on reconnaissance is never wasted: that is critical.

I can confirm that deployment of the Canberra PR9 will not affect the Royal Air Force's reconnaissance efforts elsewhere. As for heavy lift, my hon. Friend is right in saying that it remains an important question for the joint rapid deployment force. I shall draw what he has said to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and I hope that he will continue to raise that serious and important issue.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): The Minister referred to the situation around the south of Lake Kivu. Will he confirm that there are refugees there who have come from Burundi? Will he also confirm that the crisis has led to the displacement of many thousands of Zaireans? Although it is welcome that hundreds of thousands of people have returned to Rwanda, the geography and the complexities are such that there is still a crisis affecting hundreds of thousands of people. The problem has not been solved yet.

Will the Minister also confirm that some of the £10 million of aid that has been announced will be used to assist long-term reconstruction in Rwanda, allowing the possibility of stability, democracy and respect for human rights?

Mr. Soames: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that the crisis is not over yet. He is right to point out that, around Lake Kivu and in the south, there remain possibly a vast number of refugees of whose exact whereabouts and condition we know little. We need to establish those facts. The hon. Gentleman is also right in saying that there are people from Burundi there: that complicates the matter further.

As for the £10 million of aid money, and the hon. Gentleman's desire for it to be deployed in reconstruction, that is a matter for my noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development. I agree, however, that reconstruction, and stability for the people of Rwanda, will be a great prize for those people, and—we hope—will prevent further trouble of this kind.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): My hon. Friend and his colleagues at the Ministry of Defence are to be congratulated on the way in which they have handled the problem. It is true that the ability of fixed-wing aircraft to be deployed for intelligence gathering and reconnaissance is a vital part of any operation; it is also true that command and control is a vital part of any operation. Many will advise my hon. Friend to encourage African nations to become much more involved, and we welcome their involvement, but what we must never do is commit United Kingdom troops when we are not satisfied that command and control has the experience and expertise to do the job properly.

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend is right about the importance of photo-reconnaissance. The Canberra PR9 in particular has proved extraordinarily valuable, and has served us for many years. I also endorse his views on command and control. Any follow-on force along the lines that we originally considered would, we hope, largely consist of a number of African nations that have themselves volunteered to take part. We would never involve our own forces—even if we take the point made by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) about waiting until it is too late—unless we were absolutely satisfied about command and control.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I fully support what is now being proposed in regard to humanitarian assistance, but is there not a moral in all this for future defence and foreign policy? On 15 January, in two replies to questions from me, the Minister said that, between 1991 and 1995, this country had provided military assistance for the armies of Rwanda and Zaire. Does that not demonstrate that we should be rather more constrained in choosing the regimes that we provide with training and, in particular, arms?

Mr. Soames: I think that the hon. Gentleman is confused, in his penetrating questioning of me, as between United Nations assistance in Rwanda and assistance elsewhere, but on the more general point, clearly, I agree with him. We are extremely careful and cautious about where we provide military training. British military training teams in South Africa and elsewhere have done a great deal. The House will wish to pay tribute to the work, for example, of the British military training team in South Africa. The team has done so much to help to assimilate all parts of the South African army. On the more general point outside Zaire and Rwanda, I accept what the hon. Gentleman says. We need to be extraordinarily cautious, and we are.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Bearing in mind the fact that British forces had no operational experience in any of those three countries during colonial times or

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

since, can we nevertheless be wary of taking advice from the French, who have such experience, but who have such a colourful and partisan record in those countries?

Mr. Soames: I know that my hon. Friend is seeking to be helpful, but British forces have been engaged in both Rwanda and Angola within the past 18 months.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): What is the Government's estimate of the total number of Hutu refugees still in Zaire? What are the Government going to do about a British arms trading company that supplied arms to the region, which was clearly a major component in the strife that is taking place and which may have been in default of UK legislation?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman asked me first about the number of Hutus remaining. The answer is that we simply do not know. That is one of the reasons why we need to have further and better particulars before we become more heavily engaged.

As to the second point, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government have been extremely concerned to learn of allegations that UK companies might have been involved in the supply of arms to Rwandan extremists. The Government have well-established and strict procedures to ensure that any UK arms exports are both responsible and legitimate. There is no allegation that the arms have been exported from the UK, but Her Majesty's Customs and Excise is urgently investigating the matter to establish whether any offence has been committed under UK law.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): May I return to the point that I put to the Secretary of State for Defence last Thursday, which follows on from the question that the Minister has just answered? Does he agree that the long-term peace and stability of a region depends on getting arms out of the hands of militias, and that, both in the UK and internationally, further work is needed to identify the sources of those arms and to ensure that those sources are stopped off?

Mr. Soames: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the reasons for the instability in the region go much more widely than the narrow point that he raised. Plainly, as I said, we have strict rules on arms sales. As to the general and wider point of arms sales to irresponsible countries, plainly, everyone would share the hon. Gentleman's view that that is undesirable. He needs to consider more points than just arms sales as the reason for instability between Zaire and Rwanda.

Points of Order

4.3 pm

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I draw to your attention the front page and page 2 of *The Guardian* today, where there appears a report that purports to record what has taken place in the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges? The best way of handling this may be for the Select Committees concerned to deal with it in the usual way and undertake a leak inquiry. None the less, the matter is obviously of considerable importance and, although fortunately there have been few leaks from Select Committees recently, any leak casts into doubt the integrity of the Select Committee system, especially perhaps in relation to that particular Select Committee. Therefore, Madam Speaker, I should be grateful if you will consider whether other action might appropriately be taken.

Madam Speaker: If there has been a leak, I deprecate it most strongly. As the right hon. Gentleman is aware—he has made the point himself—it is, first, for the Committee itself to look into the matter when there appears to have been unauthorised publication of its proceedings. Once the facts are established, the Committee may make proposals for further action. I am sure that, as a result of his point of order, the Committee will look into the matter, but I shall take considerable interest in its activities on it.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): On a different point of order, Madam Speaker. May I draw your attention to the extraordinary events in Committee Room 10 this morning, at the meeting of European Standing Committee B, to discuss documents relating to economic and monetary union? Are you aware, that Committee Room 10, which is one of our largest rooms, was so crowded that not all hon. Members who wanted to participate in the proceedings could find seats? More importantly, are you aware that the Government were defeated on their motion, and that the Committee refused even to take note of the documents before it, because hon. Members felt that those issues warranted a full debate in the Chamber?

Will you confirm, Madam Speaker, that the Government could, were they so unwise, simply table a motion so that the House has to decide the issue on a forthwith basis, and without any further debate? Such action would clearly be against the wishes of many hon. Members on both sides of the House, however, as evidenced by the support for the all-party Select Committee's motion, which is on the Order Paper.

Madam Speaker, you may recall that, when I raised similar issues in the past, the Leader of the House said that he accepted that opportunities should be provided for proper parliamentary debate on those issues. Therefore, I wish to ask you what you might be able to do to protect the rights of hon. Members, when the Government are so obviously trying to stifle debate.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Wait just a moment. There is obviously strong feeling in the House about this matter. I am certainly not going to take all the points of order—

because they will become speeches—but I want the flavour of the House on this matter. Therefore, I shall take one or two points of order, so that I am quite aware of what has happened.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Just a moment; I select the hon. Members here. Mr. Wilshire.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I should like to ask you specifically about Standing Order No. 102, and I apologise for giving you only brief notice about this point earlier. The purpose of today's meeting, as I understood it, was to enable the Government to say at the European summit in December, that scrutiny had taken place of the three documents on economic and monetary union.

There were many points of order, and I specifically asked a formal question of the Chairman about the issue of scrutiny. I asked, "Does the fact that the Government have moved the motion equal scrutiny, and what will be the position if this Committee decides not even to take note?" The Chairman ruled that simply moving the motion did not amount to scrutiny. At 1 o'clock, the Committee voted not to take note.

By 2 o'clock, the Government were claiming that the morning's farcical proceedings indeed amounted to scrutiny. Therefore, may we have your ruling on whether scrutiny has taken place, and on whether the House has concluded this business—or does it still hang in the air?

Madam Speaker: I call Mr. Hood, Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I appeal to you to protect the integrity of the House—after the events of the past few days, and of today in Standing Committee B—and of my Select Committee? We do not recommend lightly that debates should take place on the Floor of the House. We did so, however, because of the importance of those three very important documents and our belief that the Standing Committee—with no disrespect to it—could not do justice to the necessary debate. We thought that it was necessary that discussion should take place in the House, and that is what we recommended. It was a unanimous decision of the Committee. I wrote to the Leader of the House on 6 November expressing our strong views, and he replied saying that, unfortunately, he could not agree to our wishes. A motion on the Order Paper, which was signed unanimously by members of the Committee, is now supported by more than 150 Members.

Will the Leader of the House give notice in his business statement tomorrow of when a motion will be dealt with, so that the Government cannot just slip it in at short notice late at night? Proper notice should be given, so that the House has a chance to retrieve its integrity.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. It would be helpful if you could confirm that the situation is not unprecedented, although it would be undesirable to repeat it too often. Perhaps one of the ways forward would be to reach agreement that, at least in the next Parliament if not from now on, matters will be taken on the Floor of the House when the Select Committee recommends it. Would it not be right to put it on record that the Leader of the House has written to the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee saying that he intends that the euro, EMU and stability will be debated on the Floor of the House before the Dublin summit?

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Further to the point of order, Madam Speaker. I support the plea of my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), the Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation.

Is it not a fact that the integrity of the House will not be maintained even if the Government move a motion on the Order Paper and we know the date on which they will, because it will be taken forthwith and there will be no debate? May I ask the Leader of the House, through you, Madam Speaker, whether he can make a business statement on when that motion will be tabled? Do you not feel that the House should consider referring the procedure of taking such matters forthwith to the Select Committee on Procedure? Some time ago, before the Standing Orders were changed, such matters were taken after debate.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I am taking no further points of order on that subject. I think that I have the flavour of the House on the matter.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: No. I must clear this matter up first.

What happened in European Standing Committee B this morning has, I understand, been reported to the House by the Chairman, as laid down in Standing Order No. 102(8). Further proceedings may follow in the House in accordance with the next paragraph of the Standing Order. I do not think that it is necessary or proper for me to say anything else at this stage. It is a matter for the Government to resolve. The Leader of the House will be before us tomorrow to answer business questions—*[Interruption.]* Order. I shall make further inquiries. I am concerned about maintaining the integrity of the House's procedures.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Is it a different point of order?

Mr. Winnick: Yes. I wonder, Madam Speaker, whether you can give us guidance—or certainly give me guidance—over the procedure for statements if information is received later than noon. I ask that question because it now appears that the Cabinet Secretary has protested in the strongest possible way over the manner in which his name and the names of Treasury civil servants have been used purely and simply for party political propaganda. In such circumstances, could a statement be made today?

The distinction between the Government, as such, and party political propaganda is very important. Since the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robin Butler, has made the strongest possible protest to Treasury Ministers, I believe

[Mr. Winnick]

that it is necessary for the Chancellor or the Chief Secretary to explain to the House what has happened and why the lies that are being told about the Opposition have been put out and associated with the name of the Cabinet Secretary.

Madam Speaker: Of course, it is perfectly in order for any Minister to make a statement late in the day. Ministers on the Treasury Bench have heard what the hon. Gentleman has had to say. I have not been informed that a statement is forthcoming.

Mr. D. N. Campbell–Savours (Workington): On precisely the same matter, Madam Speaker, it is clear that the Cabinet Secretary is extremely angry—

Madam Speaker: Order. I have answered the point of order that was put to me. There were two questions: is it possible for a statement to be made later today, and will one be made? It is possible, but I have not been informed by a Minister that a statement is forthcoming. Those on the Treasury Bench have heard the feelings of the two hon. Members who have raised points of order on that issue.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I apologise for not having given you notice of this point of order, but I have only just had a fax through about it. You will be aware of the severe weather affecting some parts of these islands. Several villages in my constituency have lost their electricity since yesterday morning, including 200 people in the village of Deiniolen, where several elderly people may be severely affected.

The question has arisen whether Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry have responsibility for such matters. Can you confirm that it would be in order for the President of the Board of Trade or one of his Ministers to come to the House, in view of the fact that it is a privatised electricity company that is now unable to maintain electricity supplies?

Madam Speaker: It is up to a Minister to determine whether he wishes to come and make such a statement. Of course I am aware of the severe weather in many parts of this country, not only in Wales but in Scotland. No doubt that is the subject of the next point of order to come my way.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Not exactly, Madam Speaker. It is a different point of order. As you know, we are all grateful for the judicious and fair way in which you allocate supplementary questions, but sometimes events can occur that are outwith your immediate discretion. At Scottish questions today, seven of the first 12 questions taken were from hon. Members from English constituencies. That pattern has been repeated over a number of Scottish Question Times.

May I ask you to consider three facts? First, many of those hon. Members left immediately after asking their questions, showing that their interest in Scottish affairs was perhaps not too profound. Secondly, there has been a suggestion that their interest is not entirely spontaneous, but that they are being orchestrated by the Government Whips' office. Thirdly, the way in which many expressions were made about Scotland causes offence north of the border and moved the normally mild-mannered hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) to something of an outburst. May I ask you to consider whether the procedures of the House are being abused? Is there any intervention that you can make to prevent Scottish questions from degenerating further?

Madam Speaker: I understand the hon. Gentleman's anxiety, but I recall calling two hon. Members from his party during Scottish questions today. It is good to get these things on the record. Out of the total of 46 supplementary questions, 34 were from Scottish Members. I keep a running total as we go through Scottish questions. I should also like to put on record the fact that the Members of the official Opposition tabled 27 questions. It would have been possible for them to table 40, but only 27 were tabled. I like to keep the House informed of the record that I keep up to date.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. My point arises from your ruling on the Government Whips having listened to the representations in the House about the need for a statement on Sir Robin Butler's refutation of the suggestion that he was involved in assisting the Government politically.

Surely the problem is that the House is impotent to call to account the arbitrary behaviour of Government spokespersons. What measures are at our disposal in this place to stop the arrogance of a Government who behave in that way towards Sir Robin Butler and other civil servants? Is there nothing in our armoury that will enable us to make them make a statement this afternoon?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is very wise in the use of our Standing Orders and all our procedures. He needs no guidance from me. There is an Order Paper. He can use Question Time, early-day motions, ten-minute Bills or Adjournment debates. There are so many ways in which he might raise such matters.

Mr. Campbell–Savours *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I am hearing no further points of order about that. There is important business before the House.

Mr. Campbell–Savours: It is an important matter.

Madam Speaker: Another matter?

Mr. Campbell–Savours: Could you advise civil servants outside Parliament on a matter of procedure in the Commons—

Madam Speaker: Order. I have no authority over civil servants; my authority is only in the House. That is the answer.

Mr. Campbell–Savours *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I ask the hon. Gentleman to resume his seat. I have authority only in this House—nothing to do with civil servants.

BILLS PRESENTED

Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland)

Mr. Secretary Forsyth, supported by Mr. George Kynoch and Mr. Secretary Hague, presented a Bill to amend the Flood Prevention (Scotland) Act 1961 in relation to flood prevention measures to be taken by local authorities; to repeal section 11(2) of the Land Drainage (Scotland) Act 1930 and section 8(2) of the Land Drainage (Scotland) Act 1941; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed [Bill 36].

Knives

Mr. Jimmy Wray, supported by Mr. Don Dixon, Mrs. Audrey Wise, Mrs. Diana Maddock, Mr. David Mellor, Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, Mr. Don Touhig, Mrs. Irene Adams, Mr. Bill Etherington, Mr. Jimmy Hood, Mr. John McAllion and Mr. Jim Cunningham, presented a Bill to create new criminal offences in relation to the possession or marketing of, and publications relating to, knives; to confer powers on the police to stop and search people or vehicles for knives and other offensive weapons and to seize items found; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 13 December and to be printed [Bill 16].

Public Entertainments Licences (Drug Misuse)

Mr. Barry Legg, supported by Mr. John Whittingdale, Mr. Jacques Arnold, Mr. Nigel Evans, Dr. Ian Twinn, Mr. David Evans, Mr. Bill Walker, Mr. David Shaw, Mr. David Faber, Mr. David Martin, Mr. Walter Sweeney and Mr. Andrew Hargreaves, presented a Bill to amend the law about public entertainments licences relating to places at or near which controlled drugs are supplied or used and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 17 January 1997 and to be printed [Bill 17].

Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons)

Mr. Nigel Evans, on behalf of Dr. Robert Spink, supported by Mr. Kenneth Baker, Mr. John Patten, Sir Ivan Lawrence, Dame Jill Knight, Mr. David Amess, Mr. David Faber, Sir Michael Shersby, Mr. John Hutton, Mr. Walter Sweeney, Mr. Alan Beith and Ms Janet Anderson, presented a Bill to permit the confiscation of intoxicating liquor held by or for use by young persons in public and certain other places and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 January 1997 and to be printed [Bill 18].

Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement)

Mr. Nigel Waterson, supported by Sir Ivan Lawrence, Mr. Charles Wardle, Mr. Bob Dunn, Mr. Harry Greenway, Mr. John Marshall, Mr. Michael Brown, Mr. Peter Butler, Mr. John Sykes, Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, Mr. Nick Hawkins and Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva, presented a Bill to make provision about conspiracy, or incitement, to commit offences outside the United Kingdom: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 31 January 1997 and to be printed [Bill 19].

Cold Weather Payments (Wind Chill Factor)

Mrs. Audrey Wise, supported by Mr. Hugh Bayley, Sir Andrew Bowden, Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Ms Liz Lynne, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Alan Simpson, Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mr. Jimmy Wray and Mr. Dafydd Wigley, presented a Bill to provide that wind chill factor is taken into account in the calculation of cold weather payments: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 17 January 1997 and to be printed [Bill 20].

Prisons (Alcohol Testing)

Mr. Bernard Jenkin, on behalf of Mr. John Ward, supported by Mr. Harold Elletson, Mr. Nigel Evans, Mr. David Nicholson, Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva, Sir Irvine Patnick, Mr. Neil Hamilton, Mr. Matthew Banks, Mr. Charles Hendry, Mr. David Congdon and Mr. Michael Brown, presented a Bill to enable prisoners in England and Wales, and other persons to whom provisions of the Prisons Act 1952 are applied by section 43 of that Act, to be tested for alcohol: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 13 December and to be printed [Bill 21].

Road Traffic (Reduction)

Mr. Don Foster, supported by Ms Joan Walley, Mr. Cynog Dafis, Mr. Peter Bottomley, Mr. Matthew Taylor, Mr. Harry Greenway, Mr. Jim Cousins, Mr. Alan Simpson, Mrs. Anne Campbell, Sir Richard Body, Ms Roseanna Cunningham and Mr. John Marshall, presented a Bill to establish targets for a reduction in road traffic levels in the United Kingdom; to require local authorities to draw up local road traffic reduction plans; to require the Secretary of State to draw up a national road traffic reduction plan to ensure that the targets are met; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 January 1997 and to be printed [Bill 22].

Criminal Evidence (Amendment)

Mr. Nigel Evans, supported by Mr. Joe Ashton, Mr. Ian Bruce, Ms Ann Coffey, Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Mr. Paul Flynn, Mr. David Hanson, Ms Liz Lynne, Mr. Colin Pickthall, Dr. Robert Spink, Mr. John Sykes and Mr. Nigel Waterson, presented a Bill to make provision extending the categories of persons from whom non-intimate body samples may be taken without consent under Part V of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984; and to add a further time limit to those operating for the purposes of section 63A(4)(a) of that Act: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 January 1997 and to be printed [Bill 23].

Telecommunications (Fraud)

Mr. Ian Bruce, supported by Sir Michael Marshall, Sir Gerard Vaughan, Mr. John McWilliam, Mr. Nigel Jones, Mr. Andrew Miller, Mr. Robert Maclennan, Mr. William Ross, Mr. Gary Waller, Mr. Roger Gale, Mr Stephen Timms and Mrs. Anne Campbell, presented a Bill to amend the Telecommunications Act 1984 to make further provision for the prevention of fraud in connection with use of a telecommunication system: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 13 December and to be printed [Bill 24].

United Nations Personnel

Mr. John Marshall, supported by Mr. Norman Hogg, Mr. Harry Greenway, Mr. Michael Alison, Mr. David Sumberg, Mr. David Harris, Mr. Greville Janner, Mr. Jacques Arnold, Rev. Martin Smyth, Mr. Simon Coombs, Mr. Michael Stern and Mr. Michael Brown, presented a Bill to enable effect to be given to certain provisions of the Convention on the safety of United Nations and associated personnel adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 9th December 1994: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 17 January 1997 and to be printed [Bill 25].

General Teaching Council (England and Wales)

Sir Peter Fry, on behalf of Sir Malcolm Thornton, supported by Mr. Don Foster, Sir Alan Haselhurst, Mr. David Jamieson, Mr. Alan Meale, Mr. David Porter and Mr. Gerry Steinberg, presented a Bill to provide for the establishment in England and Wales of a General Teaching Council, with the functions of developing, promoting and regulating the practice of the profession of teaching, and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 January 1997 and to be printed [Bill 26].

Local Government (Gaelic Names) (Scotland)

Mr. Thomas Graham, supported by Mr. Jim Cunningham, Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. Jimmy Wray, Mr. Brian Wilson, Mr. Calum Macdonald, Mrs. Maria Fyfe, Mr. Gordon McMaster, Mr. John McAllion, Mr. Jimmy Hood and Mr. Eric Clarke, presented a Bill to enable local authorities in Scotland to take Gaelic names; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 13 December and to be printed [Bill 27].

Human Fertilisation And Embryology (Consents)

Mrs. Anne Campbell, supported by Mr. Joe Ashton, Mrs. Helen Jackson, Mr. Malcolm Chisholm, Mrs. Maria Fyfe, Mrs. Teresa Gorman, Mrs. Audrey Wise, Sir Gerard Vaughan and Sir David Steel, presented a Bill to amend Schedule 3 to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 so as to provide that consents to the use of gametes or embryos may exceptionally be given other than in writing: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 13 December and to be printed [Bill 28].

Witness Protection

Mr. Eric Clarke, on behalf of Mrs. Irene Adams, supported by Mr. Gordon McMaster, Mr. William McKelvey, Mr. Ken Maginnis, Mr. Joe Ashton, Mr. Phil Gallie, Ms Roseanna Cunningham, Mr. Roger Stott, Mr. Jimmy Hood, Mr. Robert Litherland and Mr. John McFall, presented a Bill to provide further protection for victims and other witnesses in criminal trials: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 31 January 1997 and to be printed [Bill 29].

Police (Health and Safety)

Mr. Ray Whitney, supported by Mr. Alan Beith, Mr. John Greenway, Dame Jill Knight, Sir Peter Lloyd, Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, Mr. Ken Maginnis, Mr. Andrew Miller, Mr. Ian Pearson and Mr. Walter Sweeney, presented a Bill to make provision about the health, safety and welfare at work of members of police forces, special constables, other persons having the powers or privileges of a constable, and police cadets; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 31 January 1997 and to be printed [Bill 30].

Sexual Offences (Protected Material)

Mr. Robert G. Hughes, supported by Mr. Simon Coombs, Mr. David Congdon, Mr. Jim Cunningham, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. John Marshall and Mr. Don Touhig, presented a Bill to make provision for regulating access by defendants and others to certain categories of material disclosed by the prosecution in connection with proceedings relating to certain sexual and other offences: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 31 January 1997 and to be printed [Bill 31].

Breeding and Sale of Dogs

Mrs. Diana Maddock, supported by Mr. Roger Gale, Mrs. Jane Kennedy, Mr. Matthew Taylor, Mr. David Amess, Mrs. Bridget Prentice, Mr. Cynog Dafis, Sir Andrew Bowden, Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. Harry Greenway and Mr. David Jamieson, presented a Bill to amend and extend certain enactments regulating the breeding and sale of dogs; to regulate the welfare of dogs kept in breeding establishments; to extend powers of inspection and for purposes connected with those matters: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 17 January 1997 and to be printed [Bill 32].

Policyholders Protection

Mr. John Butterfill, supported by Mr. Malcolm Bruce, Mr. John Greenway, Ms Joan Walley, Mr. Douglas French, Mr. Nick Hawkins and Mr. David Trimble, presented a Bill to amend the Policyholders Protection Act 1975; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 January 1997 and to be printed [Bill 33].

Police (Property)

Mr. David Evennett, supported by Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock, Mr. Matthew Carrington, Mr. Jacques Arnold, Mr. David Porter, Mr. David Congdon, Mr. David Jamieson, Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, Mr. Patrick Thompson, Mr. Jim Callaghan and Mr. Simon Hughes, presented a Bill to make further provision with respect to property in the possession of the police: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 17 January 1997 and to be printed [Bill 34].

Pharmacists (Fitness to Practise)

Sir Michael Shersby, supported by Sir John Hannam, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Rev. Martin Smyth, Mr. Harry Greenway, Mr. Anthony Steen, Sir Gerard Vaughan, Mrs. Llin Golding, Ms Angela Eagle, Mr. John Wilkinson, Mr. Richard Alexander and Mr. Gordon Oakes, presented a Bill to make provision about finding registered pharmaceutical chemists unfit to practise due to ill health; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 17 January 1997 and to be printed [Bill 35].

Opposition Day

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

National Health Service

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.23 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I beg to move,

That this House reasserts its belief in the fundamental principles of the National Health Service, established fifty years ago, that health care should be available to all, based on need and not on ability to pay; expresses its dismay at the changes effected by Her Majesty's Government, which are undermining these principles; is alarmed at the way in which the competitive internal market in the NHS is distorting decisions on patient care, creating a two-tier inequitable service, and has led to an explosion of unnecessary and expensive bureaucracy; expresses grave concern about the impending winter crisis in the NHS in many parts of the country, about which Her Majesty's Government appears wholly unconcerned; resolves to take wasteful expenditure out of the bureaucratic procedures of the internal market and devote it instead to improving patient care; and seeks to restore the ethos of the NHS to that of a public service, not of a commercial competitive business.

The starting point for this debate must be a reassertion of our fundamental belief in the founding principles of the national health service, which was founded 50 years ago with the clear statement that health care should be available according to need, not according to ability to pay. The crucial question is whether those principles are being carried out in practice in the here and now. It is the Opposition's contention that the Government's actions, especially in the past five or six years, have fundamentally undermined those founding principles.

Of course the Government say that they believe in the national health service and its principles; they issued a White Paper a few days ago to make that point at great length. However, we must turn our attention to what is happening in the health service throughout the country now, not in a fictitious future conjured up in a White Paper full of warm words and lacking a single legislative proposal. There is a large gap between the Government's rhetoric and what is happening on the ground.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): On the subject of rhetoric, has the hon. Gentleman seen the splendid article in *The Independent*, entitled "Is the NHS safe under Dr. Blair's team?" Does the hon. Gentleman prefer the point that says:

"Labour's complacent attitude, which has focused on scoring points in opposition rather than constructing a viable alternative",

or the point from the left-leaning Institute for Public Policy Research, which says:

"From where we stand now, there will be no significant new public money for health care in the UK."?

Which of those is right?

Mr. Smith: I had expected rather better from the hon. Gentleman, who is normally more intelligent. If he had read the article that I wrote in response to that piece three days after it was published, he would know that neither of those accusations contained any truth whatever.

The reality is that the national health service is facing a crisis this winter, and everyone in the NHS knows it. The chairman of the consultants committee of the British Medical Association has said that the service is "close to collapse" and the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts has said that there are serious problems and that the health service faces the worst situation for years; only the Government seem to be unperturbed about what is happening on the ground.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Did my hon. Friend see the article in last night's *Evening Standard* by its art critic? I strongly doubt whether he is a long-standing Labour supporter, but he wrote about his heart attacks and about the fact that he had to choose private surgery because of the crisis in the national health service. Does not that illustrate yet again how many people in our country feel betrayed by the Government because the national health service is not in a position to help when help is absolutely essential?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. I never want the day to come when people feel that they have to go private because the national health service cannot deliver the care that they expect and to which they are entitled.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): Does not that answer illustrate the fact that under Conservative management the number of private beds in the national health service has increased year on year to the point where people are encouraged to go private?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is right. The private content of health provision has more than doubled under the Conservatives; the figure for private treatment is 11 per cent. and rising. I believe from what he has told the press that the Secretary of State for Health has private medical insurance.

In figures presented to the House in an answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) a few weeks ago the Government had to admit that health authorities throughout the country will face an overall net deficit of about £120 million by the end of this financial year. What the Government cannot tell us, or at least they say that they cannot tell us, is how much deficit trusts are facing. However, the Health Select Committee has helpfully assisted us by showing that serious deficits are looming for a range of hospital trusts.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I would not like the hon. Gentleman to develop his argument on the basis of a misunderstanding of the position. Some questions have been tabled about the financial position of trusts. We are preparing answers and intend to publish them. The net figure anticipated for the end of this financial year for the whole trust sector is a surplus of £60 million.

Mr. Smith: That is indeed interesting and new information. If this debate does nothing else, it has been useful in flushing that out. If that is the case, can the Secretary of State explain why the Royal Sussex county hospital has cancelled all dialysis for new patients for the rest of the financial year; why the King's Healthcare NHS trust has increased its waiting times for orthopaedic

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patients to 18 months, even for patients with infected hips; why Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority has decided not to contract for any elective surgery from St. Helier NHS trust and St. George's NHS trust next year; or why no new ear, nose and throat patients are being taken on by the Royal Hospitals NHS trust in London for the remainder of the financial year? If there is such a healthy surplus in our hospitals, why are they withdrawing care and treatment from patients with every week and month that passes?

Mr. Brian David Jenkins (South–East Staffordshire): My local trust took two and a half years to find that it was £1.5 million in debt. The financial regulations and the state of accountability are such that I do not know any trust that can say that it will be in surplus or debt next year because of the way in which they are run. Many of them simply do not know.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is right. Does the £60 million that the Secretary of State told us about take account of the £100 million that the recent decision of Customs and Excise on the repayment of VAT to hospital trusts will cost hospital trusts in the course of the year?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman may have missed the fact that Customs and Excise announced at the end of October that it was giving every trust, health authority and NHS body until the end of November to submit applications for VAT repayments. The story that has been running in the newspapers on that subject is wrong, too.

Mr. Smith: The Secretary of State ignores the fact that that does not apply to money that was paid out in VAT two or three years ago and which has not yet been reclaimed. The fact is that health trusts say that the recent decision by Customs and Excise eases the burden but does not remove it entirely. Whereas previously the burden might have been some £160 million, health trusts estimate that it will be about £100 million after the Government's recent announcement. Clearly, the Secretary of State does not know what is happening.

Mr. Dorrell: I am not sure about that. Will the hon. Gentleman explain how an organisation can assess outstanding VAT so that it can provide the estimate that the hon. Gentleman gave but cannot send it to Customs and Excise to reclaim the tax?

Mr. Smith: That is what the hospital trusts are saying and I place greater credence on what they say than on what the Secretary of State says.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): A few moments ago my hon. Friend asked why the Royal Hospitals NHS trust had to make cuts. Is he aware that yesterday the East London and The City health authority announced cuts in the forthcoming year of £14 million of general treatment—an additional £4 million is to be announced in January, which could mean the closure of St Andrew's hospital, Bow—despite the fact that its capitation from the Secretary of State is about 600,000, yet the doctors' lists are 700,000? If that anomaly were corrected, would not some of those difficulties be removed?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend has identified two factors. The first is that the Government often get their figures wrong—they have clearly done so in my hon. Friend's case as they do in many others. Secondly, there is an enormous gulf between the reality of what happens—in hospitals, health authorities and health services received by people up and down the country—and what the Government say is happening. There is a serious difference between what the Government say and what is being experienced.

What is the Secretary of State doing about the winter crisis that is affecting east London and hospitals elsewhere in the country? Everyone in the health service knows that there is a serious problem looming. What is the Secretary of State doing about it? Precisely nothing. When he was pressed specifically on that point on television on Sunday he said clearly and firmly that there was no new money available this year to help hospitals through the crisis. He then said, "But it is the expectation of what will happen next year that really matters and makes the difference in the decisions that hospitals and health authorities have to make." What is he saying? Is he saying to health trusts that cannot legally overspend, "Don't worry; overspend if you have to. Get through the winter. Don't alarm the electorate in advance of a general election—help will be coming along in next year's funds"?

I offer the Secretary of State the opportunity of today's debate to spell out precisely what he is saying to health trusts and health authorities around the country. Is there to be money this year or is there only going to be extra money next year—placating this year's crisis with next year's funds? If so, what happens next year? If he uses up next year's money to try to resolve this year's crisis, we shall end up with exactly the same problem next year. Instead of year on year on year of additional funding for the health service—the mantra that the Secretary of State likes to chant—it will be year on year of winter crises in the health service under a Tory Government.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will enlighten the House. Instead of criticising the Government on their handling of health policies, which is satisfactory, perhaps the hon. Gentleman will tell the House what his party would do. Would it spend more money on health? If so, would that money be in addition to the pledges already given which would increase taxation by 9p in the pound? We should be told.

Mr. Smith: I am surprised that the hon. Lady does not seem to be worried about what is happening at St. Helier hospital, which I should have thought would have been of concern to her constituents. I am astonished at the hon. Lady who, along with the Secretary of State, says that the Labour party will not spend more money on the health service. Meanwhile, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the chairman of the Conservative party publish documents purporting that Labour will spend an extra £1.3 billion on the health service. Can they make up their minds? Do they believe that we will spend more money on the health service, or that we will not? There are two voices coming from the Tory party—sometimes two voices coming from the same person. I am sure that we are about to hear them from the Secretary of State.

Mr. Dorrell: I have been too kind to the hon. Gentleman, because I have always assumed that the

proposals that were set out this morning by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary and which would have the effect of increasing costs in the health service without treating a single extra patient would be paid for out of a Labour extra spend. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that those extra costs would be paid for by the fewer patients who would be treated in Labour's health service?

Mr. Smith: The Secretary of State is talking as much rubbish as the Chief Secretary did. He must concern himself with what is happening now in the health service.

The right hon. Gentleman must also show particular concern for the position in Northern Ireland. The Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has publicly acknowledged that the 3 per cent. efficiency savings that the Government have required of the health service in Northern Ireland cannot be made through efficiency alone. The Labour party did not say that and nor did anyone in the health service—it was the Government's own Minister who said that the effect of the 3 per cent. cut in funding for Northern Ireland, supposedly for efficiency purposes, actually involves 1.5 per cent. of cuts in the service. I am surprised that the Secretary of State shows such a cavalier attitude to a Minister in his own Government admitting that the requirements of funding in the current financial year in Northern Ireland mean a cut in service of 1.5 per cent.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The hon. Gentleman will know that I endorse his criticism of both the deficit in funding for this winter and the risk of deficit in the years to come and that I share his commitment to the NHS. However, he owes the House an obligation to confirm whether it is currently Labour policy that the only additional funding committed to the NHS by the Labour party is £100 million to be derived from bureaucracy savings; and that, as the shadow Chancellor confirmed this morning, there will be no more money from the Labour party for the NHS in the foreseeable future.

Mr. Smith: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman has fallen into precisely the trap that the Tories want him to fall into. Before we can go with any real confidence to the Chancellor, the shadow Chancellor or the taxpayers of this country to argue for additional funds for the national health service, we have to be able to demonstrate that every single penny that is currently raised and spent is being spent wisely. I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that that is not the case at the moment—it is self-evidently not the case from the bureaucratic procedures that have been introduced with the internal market.

Indeed, it is precisely that competitive internal market that is worsening the current winter crisis. It is setting hospital against hospital and doctor against doctor; it is leading to the fragmentation of the service and a lack of strategic planning; and it is distorting decisions on patient care.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I have given way a lot, but I shall give way for the final time to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Dafis: The hon. Gentleman speaks of hospitals being set against hospitals. May I draw his attention to the situation in mid-Wales, where it is clear that the only way in which Ceredigion and Mid-Wales NHS trust will be able to cope financially next year is by either reducing the range of services at the district general hospital, or closing community hospitals? Is not that an intolerable dilemma?

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that community hospitals have an essential place and that trusts should not be put in that sort of position? Will he make it clear that his party, when in government—I ask this question in all sincerity—will ensure that hospitals and trusts of that sort will be protected against the unreasonable rigours of the internal market?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the problems confronting community hospitals and cottage hospitals throughout the country. The Conservative Government told us at the Tory party conference that they believed that reinventing the cottage hospital was the way forward. They are right to regard that as an essential ingredient of a good-quality health service of the future, but perhaps they can tell us why they have closed 250 cottage hospitals in the past five years. As always, the Government's rhetoric on the Tory party conference platform is not reflected in what is happening in the health service.

The introduction of the internal competitive market has introduced a two-tier service into the NHS. Anyone who doubts that need only consider what is happening in Lincoln County hospital. It has written to all non-fundholding GPs in its area, saying that it is cancelling all out-patient appointments for the rest of the financial year; but out-patient appointments are continuing for the patients of fundholders.

Norfolk and Norwich hospital has cancelled all routine surgery for patients of non-fundholding GPs. Edinburgh Western General hospital has told patients of fundholders that they can be given diagnostic scans in one or two weeks, but patients of non-fundholders must wait a year.

Yesterday, *The Times* published a letter by the consultant orthopaedic surgeon at St. Thomas' hospital, just the other side of the river from the House. He said:

"At St. Thomas' Hospital surgeons have been advised by the local purchasing authority that it will pay only for patients who are medically urgent or who have been on the waiting list 18 months. A fundholding patient can be seen and treated much more quickly."

That is the reality in hospital after hospital throughout the country. The patients of fundholders are able to obtain access to treatment in a very different way from patients of non-fundholders. That situation is a fundamental breach of the principles of equity, fairness and equal access to treatment that are supposed to be at the heart of the national health service.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman has just made an oft-repeated charge against the fundholding scheme. It is a golden opportunity for him to tell the House his policy for the future of fundholding.

Mr. Smith: Before I do so, perhaps the Secretary of State will tell us what he will do about restoring equity to the national health service, because the Government in which he serves and his policies have created the unfairnesses and the injustice. It cannot be right that

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patients living in the same street, with the same condition and the same needs, are treated differently because they have a different type of general practitioner.

The Secretary of State says that everyone now accepts the market changes that the Government have introduced. He said frequently on radio and television last week, backing his White Paper, that he was seeking to draw a line under the changes to the health service because everyone agreed with them now, so he wanted to move on to other things.

I must tell the Secretary of State that everyone does not agree with the changes. One of the reasons why we do not agree is that the two-tier nature of the service that has been created fundamentally undermines what the NHS is supposed to be about. As the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) pointed out, we want among other things to take money out of unnecessary bureaucratic procedures—the invoices for every patient, the paperwork chasing itself from one end of the system to the other, and the fact that a hospital such as Great Ormond Street each year has to establish 60 contracts with health authorities around the country and 1,500 contracts with fundholding practices. There are now 20,000 more managers in the NHS than there were five years ago and 50,000 fewer nurses. That speaks volumes about the Government's priorities for the health service.

The British Medical Association estimates that the internal market bureaucracy which the Government have imposed on the health service costs £1.5 billion a year. Certainly, we want to take money out of red tape and put it into patient care, because that is what is desperately needed.

Ministers will say that everything is fine because of the Prime Minister's commitment to increase funding for the health service year on year. The people of Britain will recall that he is the same Prime Minister who promised tax cuts year on year at the election, yet the Government have ended up putting up taxes 22 times since then.

What does this supposed commitment from the Government actually mean?

Mr. Dorrell: More money.

Mr. Smith: How much more money? How much do the Government actually mean to spend on the health service? What are the figures? The Chancellor of the Exchequer gave a revealing interview just a few minutes after the Prime Minister had made his speech to the Conservative party conference. On Sky News, a reporter pressed the Chancellor on how important the commitment was. "What is the minimum?" he asked. The Chancellor replied:

"Oh well, there's . . . What we actually did was not say"—

whereupon the reporter interrupted as follows:

"You can't say. It could be £1 above inflation!"

The Chancellor replied:

"We've not planned for five years ahead, it could be a lot of, um . . . everything depends on getting the economy right."

So much for the pledge that the Government have given us—it all depends on getting the economy right. Under pressure from the reporter, the Chancellor had to admit that he could not say what the expenditure would amount to.

It is always useful to read the book instead of gazing into the crystal ball. During the 20 years to 1992, under Governments of both political persuasions, average real-terms growth in expenditure on the health service—even under Lady Thatcher—was 3.1 per cent. And what have the Government managed during the past five years? They have managed an average of 2.9 per cent. The Red Book which accompanied last year's Budget tells us that there will be a 0.6 per cent. increase in real-terms NHS-expenditure next year, and a 0.1 per cent. increase the year after that. If the Government match that, they will have fulfilled the Prime Minister's promise—but by an amount way below the solid average rate of increase achieved by previous Governments.

We are told that the Secretary of State for Health has fought the good fight with the Chancellor and secured extra resources over and above 0.6 per cent. for next year. I expect that the sum will be rather more than the £500 million that has been leaked to the press, probably by his own Department, because he likes to massage public opinion in advance and create the expectation of a particular figure. Lo and behold, when a larger amount is allocated, a great triumph is proclaimed.

Whatever the figure is, I bet you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that it will be below the 3.1 per cent. average that previous Governments achieved. For the record, the last five years of the Labour Government achieved a 16 per cent. increase in real-terms in national health service expenditure. During the past five years this Government have achieved a real-terms increase of 14 per cent., so they have performed worse than the previous Labour Government and we will take no lessons from them about our commitment to the funding of the NHS.

The Prime Minister made no mention of capital spending in the national health service. There is no mention of it in the White Paper. There is no mention of the Government's 17 per cent. cut in capital spending in the health service. They will tell us, of course, that the private finance initiative will close the gap. That is what they told us in the Red Book last year. At the time of the Budget last year, the Red Book stated:

"Several large hospital private finance schemes are due to complete the procurement process and receive approval in 1995-96"—

that was a year ago, not the current financial year—

"with a total capital value of around £250 million."

The Red Book goes on to state that

"by the end of next year it is expected that projects worth £1 billion will have come forward for approval. During 1996-97 it is expected that the private sector will invest around £165 million in NHS facilities and these figures are expected to be exceeded in subsequent years."

Perhaps the Secretary of State can tell us why not a single brick has been laid in a single hospital scheme under the PFI to date.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: Perhaps the Government can also tell us why hospital after hospital around the country and contractor after contractor complain about the

bureaucratic process, the expense, the complexity and the inadequacy of the PFI system for funding hospital building work. I will give way for the final time.

Sir Norman Fowler: Will the hon. Gentleman concede that the biggest cuts in the capital programme for hospital building were made by the last Labour Government in the 1970s? That is indisputable.

Mr. Smith: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can tell us why, back in 1990, the Government promised that Norwich would have its new hospital under the private finance initiative, yet it is still not signed, sealed and delivered. The Government relaunch the plan every year and tell us that it is about to happen, but Norwich is still waiting for its new hospital.

There are two more specific points that I want to raise. The first relates to mixed sex wards in hospitals. The Patients Association is right to describe having to be in a mixed sex ward against one's will as an affront to the dignity of the patient. It causes distress and concern to many patients, especially women, to be placed in a mixed ward when they do not want to be in such a ward. This, of course, happens at a time of great trauma: when patients face surgery or treatment.

When my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition pressed the Prime Minister on this point yesterday, he pointed out that that promise was made by the Government two years ago in the patients charter. Yet it remains unfulfilled. In January 1995, the patients charter said that patients could expect single-sex washing and toilet facilities and that their wish to be treated in single-sex wards

"will be respected wherever possible".

Those two promises sound very good on paper, but the report from the Patients Association yesterday revealed that segregated washing and toilet facilities are far from being the norm, and that patients throughout the country commonly report that if they express a preference to be treated in a single-sex ward—as the charter encourages them to do—they are suddenly told that their wait for treatment will be far longer as a result. The pledge in the patients charter effectively offers patients only a Hobson's choice, and it is not worth the paper that it is written on.

In addition, I am very concerned that the Department of Health does not even collect information on hospitals that force patients on to mixed sexed wards against their will. The Prime Minister did not appear to understand the question when asked by my right hon. Friend yesterday, let alone answer it.

In almost every case, both men and women prefer to be treated in single-sex wards in hospital. Labour believes that it should be a matter of good practice, and the improved management of beds to achieve this end should be one of the priorities in the Government's management of the health service.

Mr. Dorrell: It is.

Mr. Smith: The Secretary of State says that it is, but the Prime Minister appeared to disagree with that yesterday. He was saying, "There are other things that are more important. We have been concentrating on other things. Then in due course we'll turn to this matter." He does not recognise the urgency of the matter and the need to deal with it in the immediate future.

The second issue that I wish to raise is the gagging of national health service staff, who are told in their contracts that they cannot speak out about the service in general or in particular. It is all right, of course, for the bigwigs who support the Government. The national health service "good news network" has been established by the Conservative party. Four of the group's regional organisers hold positions on trusts and health authority boards. They include Mrs. Audrey Collins, chair of South Tees Acute Hospitals NHS trust, Charles Bunker, director of East Hertfordshire NHS trust, Mrs. Mary Firth, chair of the Royal Oldham Hospital and Community Services NHS trust, and Mrs. Susan Wrigley, chair of the North Yorkshire health authority.

The good news network in the national health service is supposed to supply information to help the Government. It engages in overtly political activities, such as

"feeding back good news stories so that Ministers and Conservative Central Office can use them."

There is one rule for them, but for ordinary staff in the national health service it is completely different. *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State says that that is total rubbish.

Mr. Dorrell: Yes, I do.

Mr. Smith: Perhaps he would like to say that to the ambulance man from Surrey ambulance service whom I met this morning. He told me that he had written a letter to his local newspaper to complain about the downgrading of the local fire station and the implications that it would have for other emergency services in being able to reach and treat patients. He is now threatened with disciplinary action by the Surrey ambulance service. If the Secretary of State means what he says—that it is perfectly all right for people who work in the health service to speak out about what they see and are worried about and to raise complaints of a general nature about what is happening in the service and in their area—perhaps he will tell not just the Surrey ambulance service but hospital after hospital throughout the country, as they are disciplining members of staff who speak out. Perhaps he will tell them that the Government's policy has changed, because it certainly has not changed on the ground.

We have a health service that is in crisis, that tries to silence its members of staff, that cannot even deliver same sex wards to the people who wish to have them. Year on year, the Government creates a winter crisis. Year on year we see an explosion of bureaucracy. Year on year we see more managers and fewer nurses. Year on year, we see patients on trolleys in accident and emergency departments. Year on year we see cancelled operations. Year on year we see lengthening waiting lists. Year on year we see staff in the health service struggling to cope with the changes that the Government have imposed on them.

The Labour party believes that the national health service should be run as a public service, not a commercial business. Health care is not something that can be bought and sold in the marketplace. It is too important for that. The NHS should not be for contracts, invoices or market forces; it should be for patients, first, second and third. It will take a Labour Government to rescue and restore a real health service in this country.

5.6 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"believes the National Health Service is one of the success stories of modern Britain and is wholeheartedly committed to developing the NHS on the basis of its founding principles of universality, high quality and availability on the basis of clinical need, without regard for the patient's ability to pay; expresses its support for the Government's initiatives to release £300 million from unnecessary NHS administration; welcomes both the Government's further plans to develop NHS primary care and the recent White Paper A Service With Ambitions, which sets out a medium-term framework for a high-quality patient-focused NHS; and welcomes the Government's pledge to spend more money on the NHS, over and above inflation, for each year of the five years of the next Parliament."

The House has just heard a speech of breathtaking complacency from the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). Not only that, his speech further demonstrates, if it were necessary, the bankruptcy of the Labour party—the dilettante approach that it has taken for 17 years to the development of health policy.

We are having this debate because the Opposition Front Bench chose health as the subject for today's debate—

Mr. Chris Smith: Yes, and we will keep on doing so.

Mr. Dorrell: I look forward to it—every week if we can have this kind of debate and speech from the hon. Gentleman.

We might have expected, as the Opposition chose this subject for debate, that they would have had something to say. Instead, we have heard a tissue of innuendo and half truth, undermining public confidence in a great public service. Frankly, there is something rather indecent about the spectacle of the hon. Gentleman luxuriating in anecdotes of service weakness while offering absolutely nothing of any substance as to what he thinks should be done to strengthen, build and plan for the future of the national health service.

We heard not even the merest hint of a policy from the hon. Gentleman this afternoon, simply the complacent suggestion that the national calamity of a Labour Government somehow offers a short cut into a garden of Eden for the national health service. Let us take his arguments one by one and analyse what he told the House.

Mr. Spearing: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Dorrell: No, I shall develop my argument and give way later.

Let us begin by examining the so-called arguments—that is a grand word to describe what the hon. Gentleman used. He referred to the statistics that were much beloved of his predecessor, the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), but mere repetition does not make them true. They like talking about 50,000 fewer nurses. The only problem with that argument is that the nursing work force of the national health service has grown by 55,000 under the Conservative Government, and the nursing work force today is at exactly the same level as it was in 1990. It is simply not true to say that the nursing work force in the health service has decreased.

The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends like to talk about the increasing number of managers in the NHS, but they speak with forked tongue on that subject. In June this year, the Leader of the Opposition told the *Daily Mirror*:

"The Health Service needs to be managed and the management probably needed to be improved."

When they are under pressure, Labour Front Benchers acknowledge that the traditional system of management in the health service was inadequate. The Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Gentleman's predecessor, the hon. Member for Peckham, have said so repeatedly. A few years ago, the Socialist Health Association said that the NHS was "traditionally under-managed" and that Labour "should avoid bureaucrat-bashing". That is rather good advice, and the hon. Gentleman would do well to take it.

The hon. Gentleman should also examine the Labour party's record when it comes to squeezing unnecessary administrative costs from the health service. We would take his comments about squeezing out £100 million in unnecessary administrative costs more seriously if it were not for the fact that every Opposition Member voted against abolishing regional health authorities, which removed £100 million in unnecessary administrative costs from the health service at a stroke. We introduced a programme to make administrate savings of £300 million in the two years ending next March. It would be nice if Opposition Front Benchers recognised our achievements occasionally rather than glibly asserting that they would knock off £100 million—without providing any evidence of how they would do it.

In his closing passage, the hon. Gentleman mentioned waiting lists. I think that he used the phrase, "year-on-year increases." That is an impossible charge that does not reflect what has happened to waiting lists in the past five years since we began to take effective action to reduce waiting times in the national health service. In 1979, one in four patients waited for more than a year for elective surgery. That figure is now one in 250—a huge cut.

Mr. Smith: Will the Secretary of State tell us the total waiting list figure for the last quarter, which was published only a month and a half ago? Did that figure show an increase or a decrease?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman should consider what is important—I believe that it is the time that individuals spend on the waiting list. In 1979, one in four patients waited more than a year for treatment. That figure is now one in 250. Does the hon. Gentleman deny that that is an improvement in the waiting time performance of the health service? Will he go to the Dispatch Box and say that things have not improved when the number of people waiting more than a year for treatment has fallen from one in four to one in 250?

Mr. Smith: In other words, the Secretary of State's answer to my question is that the waiting list figure has increased.

Mr. Dorrell: I simply ask the hon. Gentleman whether he believes that we should focus on improving the performance of and the service provided by the NHS, or play silly statistical games.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): What does the Secretary of State mean by "waiting list"? The greatest increase has been in the number of people awaiting a first out-patient appointment. In my constituency and in

London, people often wait six or eight months for their first out-patient consultation before they go on the waiting list for an operation in a year or 18 months.

Mr. Dorrell: I mean exactly what the last Labour Government meant by the term "waiting list": the number of people who have been told by their consultants that they need a particular course of treatment and are waiting to receive it—the published figure. There has been a huge improvement in the quality of service delivered by the NHS, and it is simply dishonest to talk about a deterioration in the NHS waiting list performance.

So much for the hon. Gentleman's arguments. Let us look at what a Labour Government would do. Although the hon. Gentleman offered no hints this afternoon, I would like to discuss some evidence with the House.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): I know that my right hon. Friend has many important points to make and I thank him for giving way. I fear that, as usual, he is being too generous. He has not put his finger on the reason why the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) is sitting on the Opposition Benches and why we have been sitting on the Government Benches for nearly 20 years. When Labour controlled the health service, it was not Health Ministers but convenors of the local union who determined who would have operations in area after area, month after month. It is not a myth; it is the truth. Furthermore, patients who died while on waiting lists in Liverpool could not be buried until the same convenor said it was their turn. That is why the Conservatives are on the Government Benches and why we shall stay here.

Mr. Dorrell: As ever, my hon. Friend advances exactly the right argument. There has been a huge improvement in the quality and range of NHS services and in the conditions outside it—to which my hon. Friend referred—which disrupted patient services in a quite indefensible manner in the declining years of the last Labour Government.

Let us consider what Labour would do. That consideration did not detain the hon. Gentleman while he was at the Dispatch Box this afternoon, but I suppose that that is not surprising: he does not believe that he must answer the academic question what he might do if he were responsible for the health service. Let us begin with money. The Prime Minister has made crystal clear the Conservative Government's commitment to real-terms growth, year by year, in spending on the national health service during the next Parliament. I agree with the comments of the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) to the Fabian Society earlier this year. He said:

"Labour's health policy will not look credible at the general election if we do not commit ourselves to matching the rate of growth delivered by the Conservatives in recent years."

He is spot on, and he should persuade the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury and the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), of the force of his argument, or he will take the rap in York.

Mr. Bayley: It is hardly a great promise by the Government to increase health spending in real terms—after all, every Government have done that in every year since the national health service was established to meet increasing demand arising from an aging population and new treatments. The Secretary of State presented to the Health Committee this year figures that show that, during the past five years, real-terms growth in spending on the NHS has decreased from 6.5 per cent. to 5.4 per cent., 3.3 per cent., 1.9 per cent. and 0.7 per cent. Growth has decreased year after year, to a point where it can no longer pay for the increased costs of aging and new technologies and treatments.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The hon. Member for York is beginning to make a short speech. He must wait his turn.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman's speech is extremely helpful to the Government, because he reveals why the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury and his shadow Cabinet colleagues dare not give the same pledge as the Prime Minister. To do so, they would have to reveal the skeleton in Labour's cupboard about its record in office.

The hon. Member for York said that the NHS budget has always increased in real terms year after year. That is not true. Under the last Labour Government, the NHS budget was cut by 2.8 per cent.—it did not grow by 3 per cent.—in real terms in 1977-78. Labour's record is worse still. In 1979, under the last Labour Government, health expenditure was lower in real terms than it was in 1976. Three years on, as a result of the cut imposed in 1977-78, health expenditure was down in real terms from what it was in 1976. The skeleton in Labour's cupboard—I understand why Labour Members do not want it to be revealed—is that, during the last three years it was in office, it failed to deliver what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has pledged we will deliver during the next five years of Conservative government, as we have done for the past 17 years.

Mr. Smith: The Secretary of State ignores the fact that, in the five years of that Labour Government, the overall real-terms increase in national health service expenditure was 16 per cent., which is better than this Government have achieved in the past five years.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman glosses over the fact that expenditure was lower in real terms. In the three years from 1976 to 1979, the NHS did not grow, and that was not the only cut made between 1974 and 1979.

The Leader of the Opposition said that we should look at Labour's record. I have been looking at the Labour party's record in office, and it is quite instructive. It uses fine words about the health service, but it cut nurses' pay by 3 per cent. in real terms. What party builds a future for the national health service on a real-terms pay cut for nurses—and, furthermore, a real-terms pay cut for doctors of 31 per cent? When Labour was in office, there was 31 per cent. less than inflation for doctors. No wonder Labour is not keen to pledge itself to real-terms growth.

It is a matter not just of money, but of how the health service should be managed. If the Labour party is at sea on the issue of money, it is in the middle of the ocean on the question of how the health service should be managed.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I entirely agree with the Secretary of State's last sentence. When the Prime Minister made a

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

commitment at the Bournemouth conference that money for the NHS would rise to keep pace with costs year on year, was that commitment to keep pace with national inflation, or to keep pace with inflation as it affects the health service, which for the whole period of Conservative government has been greater than average inflation across the economy? To which of those two figures did the commitment relate?

Mr. Dorrell: As every taxpayer knows, we pay tax in pounds, not in NHS pounds. We are talking about real-terms growth in pounds corrected for inflation. That concept applies to the economy as a whole, and not to a specific part of the economy.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: I shall make progress, and give way again later.

I want to get on to the issue that is of great interest to people working in the health service. If the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury were ever to be responsible for the health service, how would he want it to be managed? He is fond of the soundbite: he used that device again this afternoon when he said that Labour would abolish the internal market. The problem is that he also uses another soundbite, which is that he is in favour of the purchaser-provider split. He sometimes uses both soundbites in the same paragraph.

The problem for anyone trying to understand the Labour party's policy is that those two phrases have precisely the same meaning. The hon. Gentleman is in favour of one description of the present state of affairs, but is not in favour of the other description of it. What kind of a policy is that?

The hon. Gentleman is clear about the purchaser-provider split. In an interview with John Humphrys on the "Today" programme, he was asked:

"But you would still keep this split between the purchaser, the health authority, and the provider, that's to say the hospitals"?

The hon. Gentleman replied:

"It is sensible to have a distinction between the people who plan and order treatment and the people who actually provide treatment."

He could not have been clearer than that.

The hon. Gentleman was merely confirming Labour party policy, which was set out in the policy document "Renewing the NHS." The document states:

"There will be a clear distinction between the commissioning process . . . and the delivering process—using budgets within those services to meet needs."

Again, it could not be clearer.

The policy document goes on to make another important point. It states:

"Health authorities will have agreements with different local health services and will have choice as to where to place them to suit patient needs."

The document is crystal clear. The Labour party is in favour of the purchaser-provider split and of purchasers having a choice between different providers to reflect patient needs. That could not be clearer.

The document states that

"between the purchaser and provider"

there would be

"a long-term comprehensive health care agreement".

The Labour party does not like the word contract, but prefers the phrase,

"a long-term comprehensive health care agreement".

Why use one word when five will do? However, the concept is the same. Despite repeated assertions to the contrary by Opposition Front Bench spokesmen, the Government are not committed to annual contracts for everything. I have repeatedly said that I am in favour of long-term contracts if there is a case for them in a particular context.

The Labour party's policy documents are clear: it is in favour of a purchaser-provider split with the purchaser having the freedom to make a choice that will reflect patient need. The problem for the hon. Gentleman is the role of general practitioners in that process. The Government's position is crystal clear: GP fundholders have the power to place contracts; if the GP is not a fundholder, the health authority has an obligation to listen to the GP, but when a contract is placed referrals must be within that contract.

Opposition Front Bench spokesmen are in total confusion. They say that they are in favour of GPs having a say in where long-term health care agreements should be placed. The hon. Member for Peckham was clear about that when she spoke to health service managers. She said that such agreements

"will not be concluded without the involvement and consent of local GPs",

but that

"when the local plans have been agreed GPs will have to work to local strategies."

The Labour party wants long-term care agreements to have teeth—very blunt teeth, it seems. In speeches made at the same time, Labour Members repeatedly asserted that a GP must be free to refer his or her patients anywhere in the country.

What Labour's health policy amounts to is that purchasers should have the freedom to place agreements to reflect patients' interests, but GPs should be free to take no notice of agreements that health authorities have been paid to negotiate. The hon. Gentleman should decide which of his two soundbites he wants to run with: is he in favour of the purchaser-provider split and of the internal market, or is he in favour of abolishing the internal market, putting the health service through another round of management upheaval and having a different model of health service management? He cannot fudge this issue: he must come clean.

In his speech, the hon. Gentleman did not even address the central question of the management of the health service, and he repeatedly refuses to do so. When I gave him the opportunity, he refused to deal with the other key issue relating to the management structure: the future of fundholding. Fundholding is the means by which we allow GPs to refer their patients directly where they choose. The Labour party has still to make its policy clear, although every policy document commits Labour to replacing fundholding. It tries to draw a distinction between replacing fundholding and abolishing it. No doubt my hon. Friends will tease out the difference between those two concepts, but I do not propose to detain the House any longer on it.

The Labour party is irrelevant, because it has nothing to say about the future of the NHS. It is widely recognised by those who have analysed them that Labour's policy statements are contradictory: they say one thing, then they say the opposite. They offer no vision of the future of the national health service. That is provided by the Government. Last week we published our White Paper, which sets out clearly the principles on which the NHS is based. It addresses the issues that politicians are said to be frightened to address. Can we afford the NHS? How does the NHS decide priority setting? When have we heard a speech from the Opposition Front Bench about any of those issues?

The White Paper also sets out the agenda with which the NHS must now deal. I am told that we do not publish legislation; the only flaw in that argument is the fact that I published a piece of legislation this morning, which sets out a future for a different contracting model in the primary care sector. I look forward to hearing the reaction of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. The proposition that the Government do not have a clear view about the future of the health service as a whole and, in particular, the future of the primary care sector, is the result of Labour's applying to the Government a criticism that properly applies to itself.

Mr. Spearing: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Dorrell: No, I will not.

In their White Paper, the Government have set out a clear route to the future of the national health service, converting into substance and reality the one thing said by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury with which I absolutely agree. I refer to the founding principle of the national health service. In this country, we believe that health care should be available on the basis of the patient's clinical need, without regard to ability to pay. That is the key principle on which the national health service was built, and I believe that those who are committed to it have a clear obligation—a clear duty—to show how that high aspiration will be converted into reality. That is the duty that Opposition Front Benchers have failed to discharge.

The NHS deserves better of the Opposition's health spokesman than we have had this afternoon. It is increasingly clear that we shall not get better from this bankrupt Opposition, and that we have not the slightest chance of seeing from them a clear path to the future of the national health service.

5.31 pm

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): I represent an area that is generally regarded as being the birthplace of the national health service. Indeed, my predecessors include not only Michael Foot but Nye Bevan.

My area also has some of the worst health problems in the United Kingdom. The number of deaths from cancer, respiratory diseases and heart disease are well above the national average. The 1991 census for Blaenau Gwent showed that 41 per cent. of households included someone who suffered from either a long-term illness or a disability, and in 1993 the social services department had 4,000 people registered as disabled. On top of all that, we have the worst mental illness problems in Gwent. Ours is also one of the poorest areas in Wales—a fact that even the Welsh Office recognises.

A Gwent health survey carried out between 1985 and 1989 confirmed that the most deprived parts of the county experienced the worst health. That conclusion is not peculiar to Gwent: it has been reached time and again elsewhere. If we are to tackle bad health, we need not only a first-class health service but to be successful in combating poverty.

I want to concentrate on Gwent health authority, Gwent Community Health NHS trust and the South and East Wales Ambulance NHS trust, which do not seem to care about, or act in response to, the problems that I have described. I will deal first with Gwent health authority. Let me say at once what the authority is good at: it is good at producing one glossy magazine after another, filled with promises that it has no intention of keeping. For example, Jeremy Hallett, who until recently was chief executive of the authority—before, to put it politely, securing a job for one of his colleagues and then doing a runner to a nice little earner in another authority—stated in one of those glossy magazines:

"Sharing responsibility is more than a quick fix consultation exercise. It must be about developing a long term relationship".

He went on to say:

"To no small extent community involvement has become conventional wisdom because we have been seen to make them work in Gwent to the great benefit of local people."

Lindy Price, chairperson of Gwent health authority, stated, again in one of those many glossy magazines:

"I would like to develop a culture of working together in the trust and county boroughs, with all general practitioners and community health councils"

and

"the general public when they are patients and when they are well".

All those statements are rubbish and no more than a public relations stunt: the authority has continually treated my constituents with total disdain.

Although everyone accepts that we have major health problems in Blaenau Gwent, Gwent health authority's response has been to cut the number of doctors. Most people would assume that the response to such problems should be an increase in the number. For example, in Cwm, near Ebbw Vale, the authority advertised for a replacement for a doctor who had resigned; instead of appointing another doctor, however, it merely handed over the patient list to another doctor already practising in the village. After a public outcry, the authority retreated, announcing that another doctor was to be appointed, but many local people thought that it would not happen—that it was just a publicity stunt to placate them. I did not believe that at the time, but I do now. I accept that the health authority was deliberately deceiving our people. But those people have no intention of sitting back and accepting the deception: they will continue to fight until they get the justice that they deserve. I hope that the Minister will investigate the health authority's deception, and the way in which it deliberately misled those with the greatest health problems.

I am not surprised at the incompetence of Gwent health authority and its failure to respond to health needs. One has only to look at some of the appointments to its board. An executive from the Midland bank was appointed recently. I look forward to the time when nurses, ancillary workers and doctors are appointed to the board of that bank, although I suspect that it will not happen in the foreseeable future.

[Mr. Llew Smith]

Then we have the South and East Wales Ambulance NHS trust which under the previous chief executive and board decided to organise shopping trips to France in an attempt to generate income. I do not expect the trust's members to know everything, but in the circumstances I would have expected them to find out first whether there was a bank holiday in France and whether the shops would be closed. However, that was obviously too much for the chief executive and senior staff, because when the trippers arrived the shops were closed. The trust was then forced to repay the cost to the trippers, together with compensation.

Never short of ideas, the trust then decided to invest £125,000 in another computer control system, which has still not been made to work. I suspect—I may be wrong—that it may have used that system to organise the trip to France. That seems logical.

Not satisfied with those disasters, the trust decided to invest £3.6 million in new headquarters, which it now accepts was an overspend of 50 per cent. It told the Welsh Office that the cost would be £2.4 million, although the directors knew at the time that it would be £3.1 million, and the actual cost was even higher.

After all that—and much more—the non-executive directors are still in place. Will the Minister investigate and find out why that is? In the mean time, ambulance cover is being cut and morale is at a low ebb. I could give one example after another of the trust's inefficiency, but I will give just one more. The trust spent £350,000 employing consultants to cut transport costs. The cuts still have not reached more than one third of that figure, so that was not good value for money for taxpayers.

Bob Hudson, chief executive of Gwent Community Health NHS trust, decided to reorganise mental health provision for people in a part of my community without consulting patients, their families, friends, nurses, doctors or anyone on the local authorities. When we protested about that in meeting after meeting, Mr. Hudson's response to the most vulnerable people in our community was:

"Well folks, you've lost out".

He then told us that he could not make the next meeting as he had decided to go on holiday in Ireland, and that in any event there was no chance of altering the plans. Consultants attended the next meeting, where the plans were totally changed and it was obvious that the reason was based on medical advice as opposed to advice from managers and senior administrators.

I mention those examples—I could mention many more—to highlight the incompetence of Gwent health authority, Gwent Community Health NHS trust and the South and East Wales Ambulance NHS trust, and the uncaring attitude of their senior people. They do not understand, care or have a commitment to the NHS. To them, it is just another way of making a quick buck. Their promises in those glossy magazines were just words—a publicity stunt.

I hope that a future Labour Government will examine those people, who are in senior positions in the health authority and on the board, and start replacing them with people who understand the service, who care for it and who know what is required to make it better. We must reject the philosophy of the NHS as a business and develop it into what Nye intended: a service, and a great service at that.

5.42 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): At the beginning of the debate, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) referred with approbation to many quotations about the so-called "crisis in the health service." He gave a further quote, that it was "close to collapse", and said that it was in the "worst position for many years".

Other press cuttings assert:

"Crisis has become an uncomfortable way of life for the health service".

They even assert that the "NHS faces collapse". *The Times* asserts:

"Patients are suffering and the wait for an appointment is lengthening into months, and even years".

Those are serious charges. Those phrases are almost identical to the phrases used by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. The difference is that those press comments were made in 1975, not in 1995 and 1996. The same sort of comments as the hon. Gentleman made and the same sort of quotations as he used were made in 1975, 1976, 1977 and 1978 under the last Labour Government. In 1975, the Labour Government had to bring in an outsider, Lord Goodman, to sort out the mess in the NHS.

My first point—I make it with some humility—is that a certain amount of care is necessary when talking about the state of the health service. Anyone who seriously believes that the election of a Labour Government would transform the health service's internal morale is not only deceiving himself, but arguing against all historical evidence. In the past 50 years, disputes in the NHS have been entirely politically neutral. If—God forbid—there were to be a Labour Government, that would not mean an end to disputes in the health service. No hon. Member seriously believes that. If they do, they should not be Members. The British Medical Association and the health unions would continue their attacks and continue to press for more resources.

Let us try, therefore, to get away from dangerous nonsense that the NHS in some way faces collapse. It is not true of the NHS today any more, frankly, than it was in 1975. In the past 17 years, there has been a successful development of the NHS. No one would claim for a moment that there have not been problems, but the development has continued.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it was not until the present Government's so-called reforms that trusts operated their budgets individually? Inevitably, those trusts have found themselves running at a considerable deficit. One of the trusts in my constituency is talking about an £11 million deficit this year. Therefore, we are talking not about the service as a whole, but about particular parts of it. The people in that service feel that it is on the point of collapse because they consider the budgets and the need to be met, and they know that they cannot meet it.

Sir Norman Fowler: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's statement that we are not talking about the whole of the NHS. I will make a specific point about NHS trusts that is the exact opposite of his point, but I am glad that at any rate some sanity is beginning to reassert itself in the general debate on the health service.

However we measure it, in the past 17 years more resources have been devoted to the NHS, more patients have been treated than ever before, and more new hospitals have been built. I do not remember receiving a reply to my question to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, who leads for the Opposition, about capital cuts in the 1970s. Waiting times have come down and nurses' pay has improved. The Government gave them a Nurses and Midwives Pay Review Body, which the profession had wanted and which has had a profound effect on the pay of nurses throughout the service.

In addition, the Government have made a commitment on the health service's future funding, which compares starkly, as anyone who has listened to the debate would agree, with what is coming from the Opposition Front-Bench team. I hope that, before the Opposition call another supply day on this subject, we might at least receive some replies to the questions of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

The hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) raised a point about the trusts. One of the trusts' impressive features has been the way in which they are now able to respond quickly to some of the problems in the health service. We deceive ourselves if we think that there will never be problems in the health service. Twelve months ago, my local hospital of Good Hope in Sutton Coldfield was at the centre of a storm. There was a great dispute about waiting times and patients waiting on trolleys. What has been impressive is the way in which the dispute has been handled, thanks particularly to my hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State for Health. We now have a new reception area, a new ward for receiving accident and emergency patients and two new operating theatres. That is the impressive way in which the trust has responded.

I do not say to the hon. Gentleman that, in some miraculous way, this is going to guarantee for all time that there will not be problems and crises. No one can guarantee that. Let us be adult about that and accept it, but the new facilities have had a profound effect on morale in the hospital. Anyone who visits it will understand and recognise how much they are welcomed.

I should like to deal with the central point of this debate, and to concentrate on the section of the Opposition's motion that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury rightly concentrated on, as did my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. It states:

"That this House reasserts its belief in the fundamental principles of the National Health Service . . . that health care should be available to all, based on need and not on ability to pay . . . and seeks to restore the ethos of the NHS to that of a public service, not of a commercial competitive business."

That brings us to the crucial and persistent charge made by the Opposition against the Government for the past 17 years: that we are somehow concerned with moving away from the principle that health care should be available to all, based on need and not on ability to pay, and that we are concerned with—although I welcome the fact that, for once, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury did not use the word—privatising the health service. That is arrant nonsense, but it has not prevented the scare from being run, year after year and in every election in which I have taken part since 1979.

Mr. Bayley: During the time the right hon. Gentleman was Secretary of State for Health, the NHS provided long-term nursing care free. If one needs long-term nursing care now, it is necessary to go to the private sector and to private nursing homes. It is no longer a free service: it is a means-tested service.

Sir Norman Fowler: I am grateful for that endorsement of my period in office, although that fact did not prevent my being attacked—just as every Secretary of State responsible for the health service has been attacked—for wishing to privatise the NHS. I remember that on one Saturday morning in 1983 the Opposition had published a "leaked" copy of a "secret" Health Department report planning the privatisation of the health service. Those reports are always secret, and they are always leaked. Michael Foot called it

"the most serious attack on the NHS since it was originally started."

That does not exactly understate his opposition to my policy. The only trouble was that neither I nor the Minister for Health could remember precisely which leaked report Mr. Foot had in mind.

It subsequently became clear that Mr. Foot had in mind a consultation document published under the very threatening title, "Co-operation between the NHS and the private sector at district level" and containing such threatening ideas as allowing NHS patients access to underused high-technology equipment in the private sector. In short, the radical idea that was so attacked by the Opposition was that of co-operation between the sectors. The idea was that resources were out there which, whether they were labelled "public resources" or "private resources", they could be used for the good of patients—an entirely sensible policy which I hope and believe that Ministers are developing.

The only sensible meaning of the charge of privatising the health service can be that we intend to change the entire basis of financing the health service and that we are intent on moving it from an essentially tax-funded service to one based on private health insurance. However, surely the only significant point of that debate is that that option has been rejected by every Conservative Secretary of State responsible for health since 1979. It has been rejected by successive Conservative Cabinets. It has been rejected explicitly, in his latest White Paper, by my right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State for Health. It was rejected by Lady Thatcher, and it is most certainly rejected by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. We are committed to a tax-funded service. Moreover, we are committed to providing real increases in its resources to an extent that, up to now, the Labour party has not even dared to hint at.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I accept those two commitments, but does the right hon. Gentleman agree that if the percentage of those using private health insurance continues to increase—it is currently 11 per cent. and

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

projected to be 14 per cent. by the end of the decade—we shall have privatisation of the UK health care system not by intention but by fact?

Sir Norman Fowler: That is not privatisation in the remotest sense, whether by intention or by fact. Let us turn the situation around. If the Liberal party wishes to say that it will abolish the private sector in the NHS, let it do so, but I do not think that 14 per cent. is an extraordinary percentage. We believe in freedom of choice. If the Labour party or the Liberals wish to say that that is not their policy, let them do so. Up to now, however, they have not done so. I will let the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) make his own speech—he has a wonderful habit of making speeches during the speeches of other hon. Members—but I would like to have their position explained.

We are also committed to achieving the very best value for the taxpayers' money that we use, which also distinguishes us from the Opposition. The real difference between us and the Opposition is in this sphere. We are committed to the NHS as a public service, which does not mean that everyone in that public service has to be employed directly by the NHS. Opposition Members seem to think of the performance of the health service, and perhaps of public services generally, in terms of whether it directly employs all its work force. That is why the Opposition have consistently opposed, for example, the initiatives taken in contracting out services.

The reason for contracting out ancillary services is clear enough, and the policy—which is not in the least controversial—is followed by other service providers and by virtually every other major industrial company in the United Kingdom. The case for it is simple. They have found that specialist companies outside can often provide a better and more cost-effective service than an in-house provider. The fact that we want to use contracted-out services certainly does not mean that we want to privatise the health service.

I am sceptical about the Opposition's new-found enthusiasm for attacking bureaucracy. If more can be done in delayering the health service, I should be very much in favour of it—although I realise that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is already promising £300 million in savings from administrative reforms. The real scandal of bureaucracy, however, occurs when responsibility is shuffled from one administrator to another, when no one takes responsibility, when no one knows where the buck stops, when difficult decisions are avoided and when decisions are for ever delayed in cumbersome committees. That is why, in the 1980s, we acted to introduce general managers into the NHS—so that the buck would stop somewhere. The reform was, of course, fought all the way by the Labour party, but we introduced it in the teeth of Labour opposition. That reform is one of the reasons why decision making in the health service is better today and I hope that Opposition Front Benchers will accept it as a permanent piece of policy for the future.

We should recognise that all parties are basically agreed that the future of the health service is as a tax-based service. There is no dispute about that. The real debate should be about which party can provide the strong economy that is necessary to provide a strong health service. That is the addition to the argument—it must be. Although the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury criticised the Chancellor for making that obvious point, it is clear and obvious that without a strong economy and strong financial policy, the health service would suffer. It may be reassuring for some to say that all that is needed is the stating of priorities, but history shows that that is not so. The matter is not simply one of making statements. When the Labour Government cut the hospital-building programme—and it was, I repeat, a devastating cut—it was not because they wanted to do so, but because they were forced to do so due to the collapse of their economic policy.

The judgment that the public need to make relates to health service performance and health service commitment. On those two matters, the Government have nothing to fear. The public also need to judge economic policy because without a successful economic policy, pledges and promises are frankly just words.

For six years, I was the Secretary of State for Health and Social Services. In that time, I acquired an immense respect for those working in the health service—whether nurses, doctors, managers or staff. The health service in this country provides the most cost-effective service of any health system in the world. Of course, at any stage in the past 50 years a case could be made for spending more money. That has been so for any Government at any time, but it should not disguise just how well and effectively the NHS has performed, especially over the past 17 years.

I would never remotely support privatisation of the health service, but that is not a real issue. The Government have made their commitment to the NHS crystal clear. It is because of the Government's commitment and record that I shall support the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You will be aware that earlier today a number of hon. Members raised the issue of an apparent slur on the Cabinet Secretary and on the impartiality of the civil service. Since then, the Cabinet Office has issued a statement claiming that the *Evening Standard* story is "a travesty". Is there any way of bringing those hon. Members back to the House to apologise to the civil servants who have been drawn into a political controversy in a completely unwarranted manner?

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is my understanding that Madam Speaker indicated that the matter was not one with which she could deal. The matter must be dealt with in some other way.

6.2 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am very happy to follow the speech of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). His speech should be read widely, because it reinforced the view that the national health service is not the property of any one political party and has not been supported or, indeed, encouraged only by any one political party. It has become part of the fabric of British life. Providing a health service is one of the things that we do best. It is certainly a hugely cost-efficient and effective way of delivering health care.

The right hon. Gentleman's stewardship of it was extremely responsible and committed. I have some minor quibbles with him, but, in general, his job was handled very securely.

It is welcome that it became clear in the White Paper—which, to be honest, was not really a White Paper, but came out under such a title—that was published last week, that the Secretary of State reinforced without qualification the view that not only should we have a tax-funded NHS, but we can afford it. I hope that the one message that comes out of the debate is that there is no threat to the existence of the NHS from some specious belief that large numbers of older people will make it unaffordable. In fact, I would argue that paying for a good health service is not undermined by an argument that older people are more disadvantageous to society. The NHS is as likely to be as affordable in the lifetime of every hon. Member as it has been in the past.

Like the Secretary of State, I welcome a debate on the NHS. I welcome an opportunity to pay tribute to the service, to praise those who work in it and to say how good I believe it is. It serves hon. Members and our constituents extraordinarily well. Of course, things go wrong and sometimes there are sad mistakes and tragedies.

I also share the Secretary of State's view that the Labour party has made an extraordinary choice of subject for the debate. Nye Bevan would turn in his grave at the lack of the Labour party's financial commitment to the health service. As somebody who was brought up in south Wales and who shares and understands Nye Bevan's commitment to the health service, I understand now the problems that he said he had in the 1940s.

In 1942-43, when Beveridge wrote his famous report and said that the precondition for a welfare state was a health service funded by the taxpayer, Nye Bevan supported that view, but had the greatest difficulty in persuading the Labour party to agree until well into the beginning of the 1945 Government. After the implementation of the Beveridge report, in the period at the end of the war, from 1943 to 1945—at the time Beveridge was not a Member of Parliament, but became a Liberal Member of Parliament in 1945 and a Liberal Peer thereafter—Nye Bevan said:

> "It is a form of torture unknown to the ancients . . . to convert the leaders of the Labour Party . . . to recapture territory occupied by Beveridge . . . I can sympathise with that fellow Sisyphus and his bloody boulder".

For all sorts of reasons, the Labour party found it difficult at first—there were many objections—to accept the whole idea of the welfare state being predicated on a national health service. It came round to the view, thank goodness, voted for it and put it in its post-war programme. We supported Labour, the Tories opposed it, but now there is unanimity.

The Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and I were pre-recording a Granada Television programme last week—which, coincidentally, is going out tonight in the Granada region—during which someone from the audience asked whether we could please reach all-party agreement on the health service and have less party politicking on it. I endorse that view. Out there, the public are fed up with our trying to score silly points on the health service and want us to take it back into common ownership and to make as many common commitments as possible.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield is absolutely right. The precondition for a successful health service is having the necessary money to spend on it. It will need more money, because demand is growing. Paradoxically, the better the health service and the more successful primary care, the more demand will grow. At the moment, demand is growing quite strongly.

Whatever the success of the economy, however, the public will always need to know the respective parties' specific commitments for the coming Parliament. Today, the Government have said that, year on year, funding will keep pace with inflation, although not NHS inflation, and all we have heard from the Labour party is a commitment to make £100 million-worth of bureaucracy savings. My colleagues and I are now in the position that we have made a simple budgetary decision to commit a significantly greater amount than either of the other two parties. I shall address the fact later that this may mean that taxes would not be cut.

Unarguably, there will be difficulties in the national health service this winter. The sequence of events went something like this: in the run-up to the autumn, no public figures were available on what the difficulties would be. As the NHS did not produce the figures, my office calculated that the shortfall this year in the health authorities in England would be at least £133.4 million, of which about £55 million came from the two Thames regions.

In October, the British Medical Association estimated that £200 million was needed. The National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts said something similar. The Government then produced their figures, in response to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), which stated that the shortfall would be about £122 million. I do not pretend that that figure is cast in stone. I accept that it will change as the year goes on. However, I know that health authority after health authority and trust after trust are really worried about what will happen this winter. The problem exists because last year we overspent what was allocated and the extra money was taken out of this year's budget.

The first issue on which I should like a response from the Government—the Secretary of State knows that I am concerned about this—is that, whatever the final arrangements for the Chancellor's Budget announcement next week, which, we understand will include a welcome increase in funds for the health service, some money needs to be made available for this winter. If that money is not made available, some people will be turned away from hospital doors and told that they cannot be treated, waiting lists will increase and there may well be tragedies that certainly should not happen.

I should like to add a postscript to that. It must be a long-term objective of the health service, if not a short-term objective—long-term should mean a few years rather than just a few months—to arrive at a situation in which we do not have mixed wards. Beyond that, we should aim to have no wards. Hon. Members may not be aware that in America—a country that we often castigate for having a lousy health service—wards have not been known for 40 years. Everybody has their own room, whether they are on Medicare or Medicaid or go through the insurance-funded system. We must move towards this more civilised system for acute treatment.

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

I have a second specific issue on which I should be grateful for an answer. A reply from the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), to a written question from me published in today's *Hansard*, contains the most extraordinary figure, revealing that the national health service needs £2.4 billion for its repair backlog. That is the Government's figure. It has increased by 40 per cent. in the past five years. The backlog in one region—Trent—has doubled in that period from £102 million to £200 million. While pursuing the private finance initiative, the Government have left a lot of hospital stock to rot where it stands. We need a significant amount of money to begin to catch up with the NHS repair backlog. That is an unacceptable situation, meaning that many places have poor buildings that are not likely to be replaced in the near future.

I should now like to make one regional point and one south London point. It is clear that London health authorities will have acute deficit problems this year and next. East London and The City health authority—hon. Members from that area are present today—and Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority have significant projected deficits of up to £17 million. My local health authority, Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham—it is also the local health authority of the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell), who speaks for the Labour party on health—has a projected deficit of £19 million for next year. I think that the hon. Lady agrees that it would be unacceptable for our health authority, serving the second most deprived area in the country, to have a settlement that forced it to cut £18.8 million out of next year's budget. That cannot be done without significant adverse effects. I have it in writing that the maximum waiting times for routine in-patient and day care treatment for our residents have already increased, as the hon. Lady knows, from 12 months to 18 months. They are likely to increase further. Those waiting times will not go up to the same extent for the patients of fundholding GPs, who have the advantage that that part of the two-tier system delivers.

I have a plea. This is not a partisan point; it is a view informed by professionals who work for the health authorities. We cannot sustain the present level of service on the present level of funding. The Government must come up with more money. That is the most important issue that we should be concerned about.

I am also concerned that the health service is becoming increasingly fractured as a result of breaking everything down to trusts and health authorities. The best example of that is locally negotiated pay. People no longer feel that they are part of the NHS if they have to negotiate locally. It is also inefficient, costing probably as much as £40 million or £50 million extra a year because professionals have to stop their radiography or physiotherapy to attend local pay negotiations.

There is clearly a lack of regional strategy. The health service would be on a much more secure footing if we had proper, democratically elected regional health authorities that could plan strategy, rather than competition between one provider and another.

I believe that the Secretary of State and Ministers accept that there is, in effect, a two-tier health service. There is a difference between those who go through the GP fundholding route and those who do not. Providers need to advantage GP fundholders' patients in many cases because otherwise that business might go elsewhere. They are less concerned about favouring the large bulk contracts from the local health authority. Patients of fundholders therefore jump the queue. That is not a fair system. If the principles enunciated by the former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield, and by the current Secretary of State—principles that are also contained in the wording of the Government amendment—are to be upheld, equality of access must mean equality of access and must not depend on a patient's GP.

The final aspect of the health service that is clearly not working is the time spent on the bureaucracy of the annual contracting round. I was interested and grateful to hear the Secretary of State say that he was willing to consider moving to longer-term contracts. I hope that we can persuade the Government that it would be better for three-year contracts between purchaser and provider to be the norm. Obviously, there must be adjustments year on year, but the substantive contract should be for three years, not one year. It may even be possible to have longer contracts. That change, together with national rather than local pay negotiations, could save significant amounts of money.

I have one other short point to make before my concluding remarks. One priority identified in "The Health of the Nation"—there is no dispute on this and it is not a party political matter—is that we should put more emphasis on mental health services. In some areas, it is very difficult to receive treatment for mental health needs in the community or in hospital. In the same way that justice delayed is justice denied, care delayed can often be care denied or care altogether too late. We must put mental health in the same league as physical health. We are all as likely to be as vulnerable to a failure of one as we are to that of the other. That should not be a matter for dispute.

What would the public like to hear from politicians as a result of today's debate, next week's Budget and the forthcoming general election? I think that they would like a year-on-year commitment to keep up with real terms spending. The Secretary of State was honest when he said that the increase was to keep pace with inflation. It is not true that there is not differential inflation in the NHS. There is. It is also true that it has been greater in the recent past. It may not always be greater—it has been coming down—but we cannot claim to make a commitment to real terms growth if that commitment is not to real terms growth in the health service, should that be greater than inflation. On the Chancellor's Red Book projections, unless there is significantly more money next year, we shall go below a real terms increase for the first time since 1979.

We also need, if humanly possible, to halt the closures resulting from the short-term cuts this year and next year. Those finance-driven closures—they are not strategically planned—of beds, wards, hospitals and clinics must be prevented. The only way to do so is to find the funds so that health authorities do not need to save the money by closing facilities.

We need more staff in the NHS. As a party, we are happy to pledge £200 million a year, which would buy the equivalent of 10,000 nurses or 5,000 doctors. We desperately need them. In parts of the country, the service is crying out for general practitioners and in some places it cannot get nurses or midwives. We should aim to reduce

waiting lists to six months within three years. It is achievable, but more resources are necessary—probably about £150 million a year. We have made that commitment.

Finally, as well as preventive measures such as restoring free eye and dental checks, which we should never have taken away and which can be funded by putting extra tax on tobacco and cigarettes, which we support, we have to make a commitment to ensuring enough general funding for the health service. It is no good relying on bureaucracy savings. Of course, there can always be savings on bureaucracy, but those are not enough.

On behalf of my colleagues and the majority of the people, I must make what might be my last plea to the Government before the Budget. They should renounce the tempting, pre-election bribe of, "Let's cut taxes." I am sure that the public want a fair tax system, with higher earners paying more to fund the public services.

As for the Labour party, I am sad that Labour Members make it a tale of some sound and a little fury, signifying almost no coherent policy and almost no funding. They have offered no answers to any of the funding questions. If they want to be credible before the election, they have to persuade the shadow Chancellor to put his money where their foot is—in their mouths. The Labour party needs to make some proper financial commitment to the health service, or it will be justifying the fears of Nye Bevan. He may have anticipated that the Labour party would not necessarily be able to guarantee the funding that the health service needs.

The public want us to make commitments across the Floor of the House. I welcome the Government's commitments, as far as they have gone—they must go further. The Labour party has to start to show what it is made of.

6.22 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): First, I must congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on his White Paper, "A Service with Ambitions". Like the chairman of the British Medical Association council, Dr. Sandy Macara, I welcome the document as a commitment by the Government to the continuation and development of a comprehensive and truly national health service. It is appropriate that, following the implementation of the reforms of the early 1990s, a focus is given to delivering a better quality of NHS care year after year, and I am sure that we would all endorse the Government's far-reaching ambitions for the national health service and the steps that they believe must be taken if they are to be achieved.

I also want to place on record a welcome for the Prime Minister's health guarantee, which he gave at this year's Conservative party conference, when he pledged that the next Conservative Government would increase the real resources available to the NHS every year for the five years of the next Parliament. I therefore believe that, under a Conservative Government, the NHS can look forward to an excellent future.

Unfortunately, when I intervened on the Leader of the Opposition during the debate on the Queen's Speech a few weeks ago, inviting him to match the Prime Minister's pledge, he refused to do so. Not only that, but it would appear that the Labour party is unable to give any policy commitments, either.

I have listened carefully to the contributions to the debate and I fear that the Opposition parties seem to prefer always to give the impression that the national health service is terrible, that patients are being neglected and ignored, and that there is always a crisis around the corner. That is a slur on all those who are working within the health service.

A few months ago, I conducted a survey in my constituency and found that, of those who responded to the 38,000 questionnaires circulated, just under 80 per cent. treated by the NHS within the past two years were either satisfied or very satisfied with their treatment. Of those who were dissatisfied, the complaints were mostly minor, and have since been addressed. Over and over again, the high quality of care was remarked upon.

One reason is that there is no doubt that East Hertfordshire NHS trust, which serves my constituents, has progressed enormously since achieving trust status in April 1992. Its substantial achievements in patient services during that time exemplify the sort of developments throughout the country in recent years.

I have drawn attention in the House to the notable advances in acute hospital care that have benefited patients in east Hertfordshire as a result of the NHS reforms, which enabled local doctors, nurses and managers to meet health care needs swiftly, flexibly and with outstanding value for money. That increased ability to respond puts the NHS in a strong position to face the pressures of current demands.

It is undeniable that hospital services are under pressure, but nor can it be denied that the NHS has always worked under pressure, from its earliest days. As the demands on our health service have increased, so too have the ability and determination of our health workers to meet those demands. They are supported in this by the substantial improvements that the Government have made in the structure of our national health service—for example, the enormous advances in community health services in the past few years. Whether run by family doctors or by community trusts, community health services are vital to everyone. They are the services to which we all need access more frequently than any other.

In east Hertfordshire, we are fortunate to have a network of general practitioners who have used the freedoms and opportunities given them by recent legislation to provide vastly improved patient services. New and enlarged premises now give space and facilities for hospital consultants to come away from the large district general hospitals to see patients in their neighbourhoods.

Patients can see their hospital specialists in the familiar surroundings of their family doctors' surgery, close to home, at a time that fits in with their work and family commitments. They receive quick assessment, with the confidence that more comprehensive treatment will be made available to them back at the general hospital if it is needed.

GP fundholders have used the flexibility of holding their own budgets to pay for those services direct, as their patients require them. Many family doctors are also using their new potential to offer minor surgery and diagnostic facilities in their premises.

Since the inception of fundholding in 1991—for example, at the Stockwell Lodge medical centre in Cheshunt in my constituency—the level of secondary care

[Mrs. Marion Roe]

delivered in a primary care setting has gradually increased such that, at present, each month 20 new clinics are provided on the site in the specialties of general medicine, general surgery with two consultants, gynaecology, orthopaedics with two consultants, ear, nose and throat, psychiatry, psychology, dermatology, counselling, and ophthalmology. There are also six minor surgery lists, with four audiometry sessions, one coloscopy session and four ultrasound sessions.

That has all been achieved with a minimum saving of £250,000 in the year 1995-96, which is subject to review, with further considerable savings forecast in the next 24 months. The secondary benefits include shorter waiting times for all patients, fundholding and non-fundholding; the provision of services in an acceptable location; better communication between primary and secondary care doctors; and greater patient and doctor satisfaction.

In east Hertfordshire, the trust hospital and community services work closely with local family doctors to deliver those improvements. The continuing advances in the trust's community services are a further indication of the benefits that patients now enjoy on a daily basis.

For example, I was recently delighted to open the newly refurbished Waltham Cross community clinic, which represents a significant development in community services for people in my constituency and in east Hertfordshire. A clinic has been on the site, providing a range of services for local people, since 1938, but the major new development will enable patients to obtain a wider, more diverse range of services than before.

Services available include a multi-disciplinary child assessment team with a speech and language therapist; a consultant community paediatrician; and a physiotherapist and occupational therapist who will visit the clinic weekly. Audiology, family planning, chiropody, continence, dental, orthoptic, ante-natal and post-natal services are also available.

The clinic is one of the many community units being developed throughout Britain as our health services meet the challenge of the primary-care-led NHS. Local access is essential, especially for the elderly, the disabled, families with young children and those with mental health problems, for all of whom a long journey to a distant district general hospital is daunting and difficult, if not impossible. The clinic and others like it ensure that health care is much more easily accessible to all.

The Waltham Cross clinic scheme was approved in 1994, with money from the North Thames region that forms but a small part of the £40 billion spent on health services in the past year. Improvements in community services result not only from better premises but from a host of advances that the Government's initiatives are helping to create.

Further examples of benefits are listed in East Hertfordshire NHS trust's recent application for charter mark status—itself a reaffirmation of the Government's policy to provide objective analysis of achievements in public service.

Those benefits include the introduction of a maximum 15-minute wait for out-patient appointments in community clinics; Saturday clinics for working parents who are unable to attend during the week; the introduction of a night nursing service; and an improved wheelchair service that will provide at the assessment clinic routine chairs that patients will be able to take away, thus providing an immediate benefit from visiting the clinic, before the customised wheelchair is delivered by the approved supplier within five to 10 days.

Among the further benefits listed are improved car parking, with facilities for wheelchair users and the provision of outside covered pram shelters and safety gates for small children; an improvement in the range of information available on a wide range of health issues; the introduction of a user committee to ensure that patients and their carers can contribute to the scrutiny and development of community services; a standard policy that, whenever possible, the needs of patients are given top priority and staff are encouraged to arrange appointments and visits that minimise disruption; and, finally, the development of a community child protection team, based in a community clinic to facilitate access for all staff and clients using the service.

There are examples throughout the country of the genuine benefits experienced by patients as a result of the Government's initiatives to improve the national health service. All those benefits have been achieved cost-effectively, with key improvements directed to patients' needs. In east Hertfordshire, benchmarking reviews show that all the improvements have taken place in an area where staff numbers are lower than average, but total patient contacts higher.

East Hertfordshire NHS trust is an outstanding example of how the Government's reforms, put properly into practice, can daily provide genuine improvements for patients.

6.35 pm

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) spoke about the good news club that has been formed by some Conservatives. It seems that every Conservative Member who has spoken today has been a member of that club, because the national health service they talk about is not the NHS that I recognise. The only time they talk about anything bad is when it is something that happened in 1975.

I remind those hon. Members that 1975 was 21 years ago; many of the people who will be voting at the next general election had not even been born then. Even if I accepted their criticisms about what happened in 1975—which I do not—I would have to tell them that it was a different health service then, at a different time, with different needs and different economic circumstances.

In the 21 years since 1975, we have had 17 years of the Conservatives in office. If the news is all good, why do we still have 1 million people on the waiting list, year after year? Why have 250,000 people been on the waiting list for more than six months? Why, last year alone, did almost 55,000 people effectively have their operations cancelled at the last moment? Nobody can tell me that that is good news.

I do not want to bandy national statistics with the Minister, because, whatever statistic anyone mentions, he will find a different one. The Minister is obviously a proponent of the idea that there are three types of mathematician: those that can count, and those that cannot. The penny will drop in a minute.

I want to talk about the reality of what is happening locally in my patch. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) talked about how trusts could respond quickly to events. He is right, and I know a good example of how they respond quickly—an article in my local paper, saying:

"Cash crisis axes more ops . . . City Hospital and QMC"—

Queen's medical centre—

"are forced to postpone routine operations".

That is how they act quickly, because they are running out of money.

For November and December alone, the Queen's medical centre has postponed 350 operations that people were expecting. The city council has stopped all routine, non-emergency operations, because more emergency operations are needed than it thought, and it has effectively no contingency in its budget to meet the demand.

Unless there is extra money for Nottingham health authority, it is predicted that next year no medical equipment will be replaced. Plans to introduce the latest treatments and develop breast cancer services will be dropped. The waiting list for routine operations will grow even more. All high-cost treatments will have to be restricted. National standards for the ambulance service will not be met. There will be no contingency plans, because there will be no contingency fund; there will be no money.

The Minister may think I exaggerate, but these are not my predictions but those of the chairman of the Nottingham health authority, Sir David White, who is not a noted socialist. He was knighted by the Government. He is one of the kings of the quangos. The Government not only think that he is good enough to chair the health authority; he is on almost every conceivable quango for the Nottingham area. He is not noted for his criticism of the Government. However, he is publicly saying that all those things will happen next year. He says that part of the reason is that Nottingham has been underfunded for many years. It is funded at 97 per cent. of the average, when, because it is a teaching district, it should be funded at more than 100 per cent. The gap between 97 and 100 per cent. funding is £11 million.

The confusion in the Government about how to deal with the problem is interesting. In February, the Secretary of State agreed that there was underfunding, although of £9 million rather than £11 million. The hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), who has since become the Minister responsible for the Nottingham area, said that the underfunding dated back to the 1960s, and could not be solved overnight. I did not expect anyone to solve it overnight, but if it dates back to the 1960s, I should have thought that the Government might have tried to tackle it in the years since 1979.

That was not the end of the story. Only weeks later, the Prime Minister contradicted the hon. Member for Gedling, and said that there was no underfunding. He said that the health authority had made it up so that it could bid for more money. Within a week of the Prime Minister contradicting the hon. Member for Gedling, a junior Health Minister, the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), said that there was underfunding, and that there was a battle to address a £7 million deficit this year. Finally, the Secretary of State agreed on 12 November that there was underfunding, and gave a hint that some more money might be made available to the people of Nottinghamshire.

That is all well and good, but how am I to tackle the letters I get from people who have been told they cannot have operations? I want to be able to tell them who is responsible for the failure to give the public the service that they deserve. Who is responsible for ensuring that patients get treated and for looking after the sick? Should I tell them that it is the Government and the way that their policies have changed the health service that has put those people in that position?

Should I say that the health authority or the trusts have handled it badly? I have some difficulty with that, because many of the people on the health authority and the trusts are Tory placemen. They are guilty only of doing what the Government want—and doing it with enthusiasm. It is difficult to blame them entirely for the problem. The blame rests fairly and squarely with the Government.

If underfunding, which we have had since 1960, is the only problem that has caused the crisis in Nottingham, why have we not faced such a crisis before? Underfunding may be part of the problem but the real problem has more to do with the changes that the Government have made: the internal market and the growth of bureaucracy. The Government talk about increasing spending year year on year, but £1.5 billion is being spent, year on year on year, on extra bureaucracy. That money must come from somewhere, and it comes from services.

There are fewer doctors and nurses and more accountants and managers. Last year alone, there were pay rises of 18.5 per cent. for senior managers, while for nurses the figure was only 3 per cent. Many people in the health authorities and trusts have watched things going wrong for some time and have not spoken out.

That is what I accuse them of. They are guilty of complicity, of not making criticisms. They have not been willing to speak out until now. The hon. Member for Gedling said that the present position had not been reached overnight. It has been known about for years, and the authority managed to survive because of the reserves it built up before the Government made their changes.

One group that I do not want to criticise is health service staff. The nurses, doctors, auxiliary staff and ambulance drivers deserve praise, not criticism, because they have been putting off the crisis, and they are still putting it off in many hospitals. They have kept the NHS as good as it is—despite, not because of, the Government. The staff will have to bear the consequences of the failure of the Government, the health authority and the trusts. The financial pressures on Queen's medical centre, which is running a £1.6 million deficit, mean that staff have been told that, because the centre's budget is 70 per cent. of costs, many of them may be made redundant. Many people who should be rewarded are suffering.

I have one more point on the local situation. I have tried to keep off the national situation, which other hon. Members understand better. Part of the reason for the present crisis is the Government's private finance initiative. It has been developed in such a way that short-term financial gains can be made, but only with long-term financial consequences. It is selling off the family silver.

For example, on 7 December last year, Nottingham health authority opened its refurbished headquarters, at a cost of £4 million. I think that it was opened by the

[Mr. John Heppell]

Chancellor of the Exchequer. I objected that I was not sure that that was a good way to spend money when other services were under threat. It is on Standard hill, an historic site in the centre of Nottingham. I did not know that the authority already had plans to sell it. I was amazed after the grand opening to find that out, not from the health authority but from a leak.

I asked the chairman of the health authority why the public did not know anything about it. He said, "You should know about it, because it is in the public domain." I then asked to see the discussions in the minutes of the multi-million pound deal to sell the headquarters building, the staff, fixtures and fittings, and then rent them back. But those matters had not been discussed. The massive deal did not appear anywhere on the health authority's public agenda, although it had been in process for more than a year.

The deal was only placed in the public domain through an advertisement in the *Estates Gazette*. My constituents do not spend their time browsing through that gazette to see whether the health authority is planning to sell buildings for £4 million or £5 million—the story is that it is to be sold for £4 million. If £4 million is spent on refurbishing something that is then sold for £4 million, it is being given away. The public in Nottingham have a right to object to that, but they cannot object, because they do not know about it.

I am amazed that, when the Government drafted new guidelines to ensure greater openness in the NHS, they said—in the annual report for 1994-95:

"In its turn, accountability demands openness. Adding to existing codes of conduct and accountability, a new code of practice on openness for the NHS was published in April 1995. Its key principle is that information should be publicly available unless there is a good reason for confidentiality."

It continues to outline what people are expected to do under the code of practice.

When I was questioning the chairman of the health authority, he told me that lawyers had been brought in to see how little he could tell me. He said that he could tell me everything that was happening, as long as I made a vow of confidence and did not let the public know.

What is the Minister going to do to enforce his code of practice on openness and accountability? The chairman of the health authority has effectively told me that he is accountable to no one but the Secretary of State. I do not believe that; I believe that he is also accountable to the people of Nottingham—and to me.

Unless the people of Nottingham are told what is happening in relation to the private finance initiative, that accountability does not exist. The Government have turned the PFI on its head: and it has become the public finance initiative. The public sector chips in £4 million, which can then be passed over to a private company with no risk. When the Minister winds up, I hope that he will say what he plans to do about that.

It has become apparent in Nottingham that the trusts and the health authority try to operate no longer as services to the community, but as businesses. The board members are business people. I have no objection to trying to run things efficiently, effectively or cost-effectively, but the health authority and the trust need members who understand people's needs and not simply how to balance books.

6.53 pm

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): The debate has been interesting—each hon. Member has naturally referred to his or her part of the United Kingdom. I have been left with the impression that Conservative Members are saying that everything is grand and good, while Opposition Members are saying that everything is bad and wrong. To be honest, I do not think that what either side is saying is strictly true: everything in the health service is not good, but nor is it bad.

I wholeheartedly agree with the comments of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who said that we should speak about a common health service and its common ownership. As has been said, the NHS—and its record over the years—of which we in the House are rightly proud, is not the property of any one political party, but of the nation. We must therefore be careful not to overstate the case on either side of the argument. Right hon. and hon. Members should express their constituents' feelings and concerns about something that is near and dear to their heart.

The public rightly wants value for money. No one can excuse inefficiency in any public service—inefficiency is unacceptable. Cost-effectiveness is appropriate and proper, whether it be in the health service or any other community service. The people of Northern Ireland—a part of the United Kingdom—believe that the NHS is in crisis. Owing to lack of finances for capital and revenue costs, we face difficult times, especially as we approach the winter months.

I am not trying to make a party-political point. Amendment (b) states that the following words should be added to the motion:

"and regrets that the official Opposition is proposing almost no extra funding for the NHS."

While I agree with much of the motion, which expresses many of the concerns that I hear from my constituents—it is right that those worries should be expressed on the Floor of the House—I do not believe that any credible political party can say that it condemns what another party is doing unless it says that it will make more funds available to the NHS. There have been White Papers, major documents, consultation documents and charter marks—all intended to improve the service—but there have to be follow-up finances.

There was a direct shift of policy in Northern Ireland designed to put care back into the community. I do not argue with that concept as I believe that people should be kept in the community for as long as possible. But although that policy has been introduced, arrangements and finances for the changeover have not been made available. The change from the use of institutions to placing people in the community—there was a dramatic change in the number of mental health beds in the Province and people were encouraged to go back into the community—cannot be made without appropriate preparation for such a move. Neither appropriate preparation nor sufficient finances were made available for that move.

We are proud of our NHS. I join other right hon. and hon. Members in congratulating those who work in it on their commitment—their service and high-quality care to the community is beyond reproach. But it would be wrong to suggest that there are no problems. My constituents tell me daily about their genuine problems and concerns at

what is happening: they see a change in the health service. Many of our elderly people feel concerned and forsaken. They believed that the health service would be there for them, whenever it was needed. When they were helping to build the service, as many of them did, they believed that they would be looked after in their old age.

I am greatly concerned that many doctors are anxious about the fact that, no sooner has a patient been in hospital for a few days, they are handed brochures for nursing homes to help them to choose to which one they should go. Homes are touting for business. I have no objection to nursing homes—they provide a service that the people need—but many of our elderly people are concerned about that. Many people who have worked all their lives and tried to save a few pounds for their old age are now finding that, when they are put into nursing homes, most of their savings are used up. Those concerns are widely felt in my constituency.

Many of the farms in my constituency are small, family farms that have been handed down for generations. The farmers do not consider that they own those farms, but that the farms have been lent to them for the period of time that they are on this earth, to be passed on to the next generation. Now, however, when many elderly people enter nursing homes, their farms have to be sold, which has caused a change in the make-up of the community. The elderly are right to express their concerns to us, as their elected representatives, and, as such, it is right that we express those concerns in the Chamber tonight to the Minister concerned.

The Minister with responsibility for health services in Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss), sent out a document stating that there had to be a 3 per cent. cut for three consecutive years, starting this year. Half of that—1.5 per cent.—is demanded from cuts and savings in administration; but the other 1.5 per cent. will come directly from the service to the people.

To be fair to the Under-Secretary, I have to say that he is the first Minister who has come out and stated that to be a fact. Every other Minister would cover it up and say, "No, no, no. There are no real cuts—we are looking for those 3 per cent. cuts, but it will not affect the service." At least this Minister had the honesty to state openly that savings were being sought in the service. Although I am prepared to give him full credit for his honesty, it does not alleviate my concern about the effect of the cuts on the community.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): My hon. Friend will be aware that there was an Adjournment debate today, in which was highlighted the case of a hospital that five successive Ministers for health promised would be built in the Causeway to serve the region of north Antrim and east Londonderry. That project is now in doubt and, although £10 million has already been spent on the scheme, it is now questionable whether it will ever be completed. Surely that should set the alarm bells ringing.

Rev. William McCrea: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention—that case causes me great concern. I have been a member of several delegations and deputations to the Minister in respect of that hospital. The Minister promised us, with hand on heart, that the hospital would be built and that, therefore, the moneys that had already been spent would not be lost. I should be greatly concerned to learn that it is now being suggested that all those Ministers' promises down the years have been nothing more than hot air and are meaningless.

There is an urgent need for a Causeway hospital in Coleraine to serve that wide area. A hospital was taken away from Ballymena, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley), and the people were promised that the area around Coleraine and Portrush would be served by a modern, up-to-date hospital. The Minister cannot get away with reneging on a promise that he has made and that successive Ministers have consistently made to the community.

Those year-on-year 3 per cent. cuts will eat into the very heart of health service provision to the community and we must not permit them to happen. Although the Government, perhaps with the forthcoming election in mind, have suggested that more money will be made available on the mainland—perhaps as much as £300 million will be released for the health service here—the truth is that no extra finance is coming to the Province. Therefore, the 1.5 per cent. direct cut in the service will certainly be felt by the community. We face the closure of homes for the elderly and cuts in the home-help service. That is a crying shame and the community is deeply concerned at the lack of resources.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I support the hon. Gentleman in the two points that he has made. First, as an English Member of Parliament, I say that it would be completely unfair if the additional money for the health service that has been announced by the Chancellor and by the Secretary of State for Health was not shared throughout the United Kingdom on an equal basis. Secondly, we cannot continue to have an arbitrary percentage cut in the budget year on year imposed simply in the name of efficiency, without any explanation or justification. The Government cannot set a target without explaining it. If the health service needs more money, it needs more money even if it also has to strive continually to be efficient.

Rev. William McCrea: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. First, it is sadly true that none of the tranche of money that has been announced will go to Northern Ireland. Secondly, as the Minister has openly stated, half of that 3 per cent. cut—1.5 per cent.—will directly hurt the service that is provided. I wholeheartedly accept the points that the hon. Gentleman made, both in that intervention and in his earlier speech.

The current system of trusts in the Province has created a level of administration that is unprecedented in any other part of the United Kingdom. In order to enable competition within the service, we have created many businesses—more than 20, serving 1.6 million people and all with their own chief executives, accountants and other administrative staff. We seem to be filling up the health service with an increasing number of senior administrators, who exert a great draw on the available resources, while at the same time the number of staff who actually deliver service to the patients is decreasing, to the detriment of patients in the Province. We need extra nursing staff and doctors in the health service.

I give the ambulance service in my constituency as an example. Two weeks ago, a newspaper reported that the ambulances going out on emergencies to people suffering

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cardiac arrest are breaking down because they are years out of date. We can no longer be sure that ambulances will get to those who require urgent hospitalisation. The community is, rightly, concerned. I ask the Minister to encourage the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who is now on the Front Bench, to provide the appropriate ambulances for my constituents so that they will get to hospital and receive the treatment they need.

Many other hon. Members want to speak, so I shall conclude. Although in the Province we appreciate the good things—and there are good things—in the health service, we believe that we are confronted with a crisis. We believe that the waiting times of patients requiring urgent hospital treatment and so on need to be attended to, and they cannot be attended to without adequate resources.

Whatever the governing party, no matter what is said about the national health service, unless the finances are made available we shall never be able to ensure that the national health service maintains the standing that we and our constituents have come to expect.

I shall listen with care to what other hon. Members, especially from Her Majesty's Opposition, say about their commitment to ensure adequate resources for the health service. For without adequate resources, all the rest will be hot air.

7.10 pm

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): I shall start by contrasting the image presented in the so-called White Paper, "The National Health Service: A Service with Ambitions", with the reality, especially as seen by a Member representing a Leeds constituency.

As its title suggests, the White Paper portrays the national health service as the Government would like it to be, not as it is. If the comprehensive health service in Leeds—the trusts, the health authority in its purchasing role and the Leeds Community and Mental Health Services Teaching NHS trust—were to receive £1 million for every time that the words "should", "could" or "needs to be" appear in that document, the health service in Leeds would be doing very well indeed. Sadly, the truth is rather different.

In their paper, the Government have postulated a health service in which their reforms are achieving what it is or was claimed that they would achieve. Perhaps if that were the case, the "ambitions" of the White Paper could be realised; but when examined in the real world, which is very different from the glossy aspirations, which reflect more hope than expectation, it becomes plain that the NHS reforms are not working, and that the proliferation of bureaucracy, which other hon. Members have spoken about, and the basic underfunding, which I want to speak about, have combined to the worst possible effect. That is evident in Leeds.

The Government themselves obviously believe that the NHS is underfunded. The uncosted promise made by the Prime Minister at this year's Tory party conference shows that they are at least conscious of the need for an increase in funding. But what are the public to make of an ambition to increase spending in real terms "year on year" which is conditional on what is described as a "growing economy" when the same Government are now telling the British people that a series of Labour aspirations—no more than wishes—add up to £30 billion of spending commitments?

I am dismayed by the attitude of the Minister and the approach of the Government, and of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who spoke for the Liberal Democrats, who expects commitments to be treated in the way in which the *Express* today talked about things that were desirable as resources allowed. Understandably, it is very difficult for members of the Labour party to offer spending commitments when their wishes are so misused by the Government in their propaganda and by other parties. We are embarked on a process in which electioneering of the lowest possible kind is becoming an everyday fact of life.

Given that process, and given this morning's publicity, I believe that the Prime Minister's vague NHS spending pledge should be regarded as having all the veracity of the White Paper's "ambitions".

I want to talk about the health services in Leeds. I believe that, by doing so, I shall shed light on the fictitious examples of best practice that the White Paper says should occur everywhere, revealing them as hollow. In the Leeds area, there are many skilled hospital and medical staff who share the Government's ambitions but strongly disagree with the chosen means of achieving them. I believe in being fair, so I shall mention some good aspects of the service in Leeds.

I have visited and spent time in the paediatric intensive care unit in the Leeds general infirmary, headed by Dr. Mark Darowski. It is an extremely good service, providing the best paediatric intensive care in the region. It is true that its skilled staff should, in the language of the White Paper, be able to meet the needs of the area, but that is a matter for the Government. They certainly did not do so last winter, and the changes that have come about or are coming about as we approach this winter will not enable them to meet those needs, despite the Secretary of State's promise in a statement to the House.

The community mental health day facility in Leeds has some longer-term beds, but it is run by the Leeds Community and Mental Health Services Teaching NHS trust. It was a great pleasure to open a facility in Middleton in my constituency. It must be able to meet fully the needs of the community that it is intended to serve, but the Leeds Community and Mental Health Services Teaching NHS trust, like the other parts of the Leeds service, is in deficit.

To surprise the Minister, let me pick out a welcome development. A GP fundholding practice in my constituency is building a day facility for people in Morley. It will not carry out large day surgery operations but it will do some things that will save people going to Leeds. In view of transport costs, I welcome that facility.

However, I very much hope that—as I am sure is the intention of those who are carrying out the development—the facility is available to all patients. If it were available only to people who happen to be patients of fundholding practices, it would emphasise the inequity in the system. I hope that, with the co-operation of the health authority and Her Majesty's Government, that facility can be made available for use by every general practitioner in Morley, as it would be under a local commissioning system that the Labour party would introduce.

I am not saying that good things are not happening; they are, but in each case there are flaws in the current system. The fundamental flaw is that, as the Secretary of State well knows, Leeds is grossly underfunded. Leeds general infirmary, the United Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS trust, has a large deficit. I have been told that the trust's deficit is between £5 million and £11 million; I believe that it is nearer to £11 million.

The chief executive of the trust is one of the few chief executives with a salary of more than £100,000 a year. Running a facility like that, which the Government regard as a business, is obviously a highly responsible job, but the salary may be excessive, given the trust's deficit. I would expect the Minister to agree with me about that.

St. James's hospital, too, is suffering from a massive shortfall in funding and is in debt to the tune of between £2 million and £6 million. The Secretary of State knows the problems of Leeds very well because my fellow Labour Leeds Members of Parliament and I visited him some time ago to stress the difficulties being faced. We were encouraged to do so by the Leeds health authority, which also faces a considerable deficit and cannot purchase as it would want to.

In Leeds, all the bodies set up by the Government's reforms are in deficit, so the Leeds hospital service faces something of a crisis. When we spoke to him, the Secretary of State agreed to facilitate a meeting between the community health council—it also feels strongly about the shortage of funding—and the Minister. Representatives spoke to the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam). As a result of those discussions, however, no new money has been promised to Leeds. I am not talking about new money for the distant future; I am talking about money that is needed now, for this winter.

Leeds general infirmary was exercised—so were Ministers—about the two patients who were relatives and who both died on trolleys waiting for treatment at the infirmary. One of them had waited for eight hours before dying, the other had waited five hours. It is pure coincidence that they happened to be brother and sister. Leeds general infirmary soon realised that it needed more space for intensive care beds, but it can achieve that only at the expense of cutting 40 beds in the gynaecological unit. That work, too, is important.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) drew attention to the fact that the number of bureaucrats has been increasing in the service every year while the number of beds in hospitals has declined. It is certainly a priority to increase the number of intensive care beds, but surely not at the expense of 40 other beds. The trust should not have to make that choice.

I wrote to the Secretary of State about the paediatric intensive care unit, which lacked the space for more than the five beds which it had been granted. It was then granted a sixth bed—which seems to represent an increase of one, but the space remains the same. Last winter, when there was a crisis, six beds were put into the same space. Now that the unit officially possesses six beds, perhaps a little more money will be forthcoming to staff it. It is a first-rate facility offering skilled treatment. That, after all, is why Nicholas Geldart was sent in the direction of Leeds. But a skilled facility needs enough space in which to operate. I therefore look forward to hearing that the intensive care unit will receive the funding for the extra beds that have been promised to the region: that is essential.

It is instructive to look at real cases, as opposed to the fictional cases offered us in the White Paper. When asked whether those cases were fictional, the Department of Health described them as composites of what they hoped future cases treated by the service would look like. I should like to describe some waiting list cases from the real world.

A woman of 93 suffered from a cataract, and her neighbour brought her to see me. She had to wait two years before even being seen, so between age 93 and 95 her vision would remain badly impaired. I am glad to say that because I wrote to the chief executive she was rapidly treated. It should not however be necessary for a woman of 93 to be put in touch with her Member of Parliament for action to be taken. A person who obviously needs treatment right away should be dealt with right away.

Another case that has come to my knowledge concerns a patient whose need to be seen was less urgent. When he came to see me, he had been told that he was on a waiting list of 108 weeks. I wrote to the chief executive of St. James's and Seacroft hospitals, who answered me as follows:

> "On a more general note, at present the orthopaedic service receives more referrals than we are currently able to deal with. This is not a new problem and we are working closely with our major purchaser, Leeds Health Authority, to reduce the waiting times for first appointment. We have 250 patients waiting to be seen for the first time in the orthopaedic out-patient department . . . The length of time these patients wait varies very considerably, often depending on their clinical need. Once these patients have been seen, if the decision is taken to place them on the in-patient waiting list, again the length of waiting time varies. We achieve the Patient's Charter standard of no waiting longer than 12 months".

So having waited two years and two months for his first appointment, my constituent faces another 12 months of waiting for treatment.

Before closing I want to mention the Leeds radiology service. I have written to the Secretary of State about the service run by the United Leeds Teaching Hospitals trust. I was referred to the chairman of the trust, to whom I suggested that people were not being treated on time. Referring to a recommendation from the Royal College of Radiologists, he said:

> "We acknowledge this recommendation . . . but due to inadequate capital resourcing our ability to start radiotherapy when clinician/clinically required is about four weeks longer than we would wish for some categories of breast patient."

It is not good enough to have to wait an extra four weeks—and all for lack of at least one new linear accelerator. We cannot wait for it to come; people are waiting longer than they should for the crucial first treatment that will enhance their survival chances.

It is, I contend, immoral to spend taxpayers' money on producing thousands of copies of a glossy, 60-page White Paper that presents an idealised account of what the health service could be with no concrete explanation of how to get there, in Leeds or anywhere else. The answer of course is more money. I also believe it wrong to involve civil servants in the preparation of a document that is totally bereft of practical policy. It is no more than a treading-water exercise, six months short of an election, conducted at great public expense to enhance the electoral

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prospects of the Government—and the career prospects of some of its members. What the White Paper will not do, however, is benefit any member of the public who takes it, as intended, at face value.

7.27 pm

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): I apologise for not having been present for much of the debate, but I have been serving on a Standing Committee in which no pairing is allowed. Secondly, I declare an interest as an adviser to the Ivax Corporation and to the Western Provident Association, a non-profit-making body.

A few weeks ago my mother was seriously ill. She was immediately taken to the Royal Aberdeen infirmary where she was given the finest treatment imaginable. She is not exceptional: millions of other people are treated well by the national health service. We can all shroud-wave if we want to: we all know of constituency examples involving absurdities, bad management or the stupidity that one expects from any bureaucracy—but those are the exceptions, not the rule. The majority of people in Britain get a darned good service from the national health service.

I am fed up with being defensive about the health service. We should be proud of the achievements over the past few years: the fact that the health service is growing by 3 per cent. per year; the fact that productivity has increased by 40 per cent.; the fact that we are spending more money above inflation than ever before; the fact that, despite all the upheavals of the reforms that were necessary, we are treating 1 million more people than ever before and the waiting lists are at their lowest level since records began.

People would have laughed in our faces if, 10 years ago, we had given guarantees—in so far as guarantees are possible in any bureaucracy—that there would be treatment or an operation within a set period, as the patients charter requires. Yet it works—and, by and large, it works pretty well.

Earlier in the debate I challenged the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) about an article that appeared in *The Independent* entitled, "Is the NHS safe under Dr Blair's team?" The sub-heading states:

"The Opposition's once distinctive stance on health has dissolved for lack of fresh thinking. Jack O'Sullivan examines a failure that the Tories will exploit in the next general election".

The article begins:

"The NHS may be in poor shape, but its condition is nothing like as moribund as Labour's performance on health. After 17 years in opposition, the party no longer has a stance on the NHS that is either distinctive or convincingly deals with the problems that the service faces."

The Independent is not exactly a Conservative newspaper. The journalist refers to

"Labour's complacent attitude, which has focused on scoring points in opposition rather than constructing a viable alternative."

That is precisely what we have heard today. I know that we are in that awful pork-barrel cycle in the run-up to a general election, but Labour's attitude seriously worries the elderly, the frail and the vulnerable. I hope that the Opposition realise how irresponsible their shroud-waving and scare stories are.

The article goes on to ask:

"But what did Labour's opposition amount to? That the NHS needed more cash and that the Tories' changes would lead to privatisation".

We have heard all that.

"The message rang true for voters. But it was a cynical tactic because, in reality, Labour offered little alternative to Tory policy, an inadequacy overlooked in the hysteria about funding shortfalls and the supposedly sinister hidden agenda of the Tories."

The article states that

"the best that Chris Smith, Labour's new health spokesman, could offer at the party conference was an extra £40 million, gleaned from administrative savings, to cut cancer surgery waiting times."

The writer reports that a policy document, "New Agenda for Health", was published a few weeks ago by the left-leaning Institute for Public Policy Research, which states:

"From where we stand now there will be no significant new public money for health care in the UK".

That is where Labour stands. I admire the courage of Opposition Members who use the forbidden word—the U word—underfunding. Why do they not tell us how they will match the money that the Government have given to the health service? Why do they not tell us their spending plans? It is not surprising that so many people—

Mr. Chris Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman tell us precisely what the Government's spending plans are for the next three years?

Mr. Hayes: It has been made clear what spending on the health service will be. My hon. Friend the Minister will go into great detail later.

Mr. Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman tell us some figures? The Government have not done so. No specific figure has been given for any of the next three years.

Mr. Hayes: In line with inflation—3 per cent. growth per year, year on year. That is the Government's promise: in line with inflation. They will deliver more money than the health service has ever had before—£42.5 billion.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I am fascinated by the vision of the health service getting richer and richer under the Conservatives. I do not ask the hon. Gentleman for further details relating to south Yorkshire, but Rotherham health authority has to cut last year's budget by £500,000 to £1 million. If all that new money is coming in, why are my constituents getting a worse service? Why is North-East Derbyshire health authority tell GPs that there can be no more elective surgery until the end of the financial year?

Mr. Hayes: I do not believe for one moment that any constituent is getting a worse service than before the reforms. I cannot give the exact figures to answer the hon. Gentleman's question because I am not an expert on Rotherham, but more cash has gone into his health authority and his national health service trust than ever before. It is up to the people who run those trusts to spend it in the right way.

Mr. MacShane *rose—*

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Gentleman knows the amount of money that is being poured into the health service. He cannot deny it. He is an honourable, reasonable man. He

knows the reality. He is trying to score a few political points, for which I cannot blame him in the run-up to a general election.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury wrote an article in response to the terrible accusations against his policy—I use the word loosely—by *The Independent*. He stated:

"But we do want to make changes, because the introduction of the competitive internal market has caused immense damage. It has set hospital against hospital, doctor against doctor."

One might have thought that there would be a massive policy change, but there will still be the split between the provider and the purchaser. If that split still exists, can the hon. Gentleman tell the House that there will not be an internal market? Of course there will be an internal market. That is what has been producing the results and leading to greater efficiency and more patients being treated than ever before.

The article goes on:

"Secondly, we envisage the development of a recuperation service, to help people recover from major treatment in a supported environment near to their home, rather than being forced out of hospital too early."

Have we had any figures for that? Is it an aspiration? Is it an aim? Is it costed? If so, will the hon. Gentleman tell us how much it will cost? I will give way to him, if he is listening. That is an important spending commitment. Is it a policy or just an election bribe with no price tag on it?

The article continues:

"Fourthly, there is our proposal to use savings from excessive bureaucracy to fund, among other things, a reduction in waiting times for surgery for cancer."

The hon. Gentleman voted against the Government's plans to reduce bureaucracy. He and his party voted against the abolition of the regional health authorities. He wants to free £100 million from savings on bureaucracy. This year alone the Government have released £300 million, as my hon. Friend the Minister explained.

The article states:

"Inequality of income and condition has a major impact on the quality of people's health, and inequality has widened dramatically over these past 17 years. We want to begin to put that right in government."

We all want to put that right in government, but it is a typical Labour aspiration of motherhood and apple soufflée. It is meaningless. The hon. Gentleman does not tell us how it will be done, or what money will be put into it, because he does not know. The iron shadow Chancellor will not tell him, because he does not know either.

What are these great policies—this great new Jerusalem—towards which the Opposition are leading us? The issue is not more money for the health service, although that is the issue on which they have fought election after election. It is the battle of the suits. They claim that Labour are better managers than the Tories.

Mr. MacShane: Yes.

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Gentleman says yes. He should go around some of the local authorities that are run by Labour. He should come to Harlow, where £1.8 million was lost out of a budget of £12 million and a load of people had to be sacked. That is the sort of management that there would be under Labour. Just look at local government.

The Labour party's proposals are delightfully vague. They tell us absolutely nothing.

Mr. MacShane *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Member for Rotherham sagely shakes his head, because he knows that the moment any spending plan is brought before the electorate and the House my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench will explain to the people where it is to come from.

Mr. MacShane: Will the hon. Gentleman endorse Labour's policy for a windfall tax to put a quarter of a million people back into work?

Mr. Hayes: Like so many other things, that does not work. The hon. Gentleman is talking about raiding pension funds, about raiding the consumer and about raising energy prices, which will affect the elderly, the frail and the vulnerable. That is what the hon. Gentleman wants to do, but it does not add up—like everything else that we have had from the embattled party on the Opposition Benches, which genuinely believes that it will win the next general election.

If ever an Opposition motion should have been strangled at birth, it is this one. I beg the House to oppose it.

7.40 pm

Dr. Joe Hendron (Belfast, West): Health has been defined by the World Health Organisation as a state of complete physical and mental well-being, not merely the absence of disease. The national health service was established in Northern Ireland in 1948, two years after it was established in Britain. Its purpose was to provide cradle-to-grave care for the entire community. That was nearly 50 years ago. Today there is a crisis in that great service, and there is a crisis in Northern Ireland.

I have listened carefully to the debate. Of course there are many good things with the national health service. Why would there not be? But that does not mean that there is not a crisis. I speak as a non-fundholding general practitioner who does very little GP work at this time. The main threat to health care provision is the across-the-board efficiency saving of 3 per cent. per annum which has been imposed by Government. It is, of course, Government policy to encourage people to take out private insurance.

In a recent article in the *British Medical Journal*, a group of senior medical consultants said that patients' lives were being placed at risk because of the pressure on trusts to make year-on-year efficiency savings of 3 per cent. The consultants said that cash cuts meant that patients were being sent home by hospitals much too soon after surgery. Indeed, in Northern Ireland there are many examples of patients being discharged with undue haste and with limited provision for follow-up care at home.

Although Northern Ireland receives 11 per cent. more per capita on health expenditure than the average for the United Kingdom, other statistics must be taken into consideration. Northern Ireland suffers 20 per cent. more heart deaths among men than the average in the United Kingdom. That indicates that for that component of the health service we would need an increase in resources of about 20 per cent. Northern Ireland's unemployment rate

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is 40 per cent. higher than the rest of the United Kingdom. With unemployment comes increased visits to GPs, increased drug prescribing, increased referrals to out-patient departments and increased admissions to hospitals. Those were the words of the Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland in her recent report on the health of the people of Northern Ireland.

In addition to the increased number of heart deaths and the increased numbers in unemployment and poverty, it must be remembered that a quarter of a century of terrorist violence has brought with it increased health needs among our peoples, and that applies very much to both communities.

In recent weeks, the Prime Minister endowed the Secretary of State for Health—I hesitate to say this, as I have heard other hon. Members mention the figure of £300 million—with additional money for the health service. The Northern Ireland media gave the figure as £500 million. Perhaps that is inaccurate, but it is somewhere around that figure. I understand that not a penny piece of that will be directed to Northern Ireland. Indeed, it appears that it will go to England and Wales. If the first figure is correct, in terms of population it would mean £17.5 million for the health service in Northern Ireland.

In his statement of 12 February, the Health Minister for Northern Ireland, who was here earlier, said that cuts would not be implemented without reductions in service. I believe that that point was made by the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea). I congratulated the Minister at the time on his forthrightness in making that statement. I hope that he will guarantee that additional funding, in real terms, will be made available to deal with the implications of the Children Order. Will additional resources be made available to ensure that health boards can fulfil the commitment in terms of community care, which is required by the Government's legislation?

Has the Department of Health in Northern Ireland an accurate device to calculate the health needs and resources for health for the people of Northern Ireland in comparison to a base population, for example, that of England and Wales? How can the Minister be sure that resources that have been provided are adequate to meet the health needs of the population in Northern Ireland, bearing in mind the increased disease, poverty and unemployment? In its report published on 14 November, the Northern Ireland Audit Office recommended that any review of the capitation formula for funding should aim to ensure that the distribution of funds to purchase treatment matches the identified and prioritised needs of the purchasing authorities.

Why do we need more resources in Northern Ireland? It is the poorest region in the United Kingdom. I do not think that anyone would argue with that. In Northern Ireland, unemployment stands at 11.1 per cent.—39.8 per cent. higher than the United Kingdom average—and 38 per cent. of households live in poverty. Basic essentials cost more in Northern Ireland. For example, electricity prices are 3 per cent. higher. Although we spend 11 per cent. per capita more on the health service than the rest of the UK, our coronary heart disease level is 20 per cent. higher and unemployment is 40 per cent. higher. Long-term unemployment is linked with an increase in the use of prescribed drugs, in consultations with GPs, in the use of hospital services and in the level of physical illness. Those figures come from the 1995 annual report of the Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland. All of that inevitably leads to increased demands on the health service in Northern Ireland.

What do the health cuts mean to the people of Northern Ireland? They mean that home help services are being cut, a reduction in meals on wheels, a reduction in key staff in the community such as social workers, community psychiatric nurses and day centre staff. I pay tribute to the people involved in primary health care, having been involved in it myself for 35 years in west Belfast. The cuts mean waiting lists for funding for domiciliary care packages and residential care. The hon. Member for Mid-Ulster referred to that earlier.

The Royal Victoria hospital Belfast has announced that it will not carry out non-emergency surgery on patients from non-fundholding GPs. The Ulster hospital carries out cancer procedures on patients of non-fundholding GPs free of charge, and I give it full marks for that. The Western health board in Northern Ireland has cut coronary artery bypass operations by 10 per cent. and there has been a 20 per cent. reduction in joint replacements and in ear nose and throat operations. If that is not a crisis, I do not understand the meaning of the word. There have been massive cuts at the Mater Infirmorum Hospital Health and Social Services trust. And so it goes on. I am aware that other hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall move on quickly.

On 30 October 1996, the Royal Victoria hospital, which is known world wide for its excellence—it was the first hospital in the world to have a cardiac ambulance—announced that because of funding difficulties faced by the Eastern health board it would have to stop non-urgent work across a wide range of specialties. The patients of GP fundholders would be all right—it was the patients of non-fundholding GPs who would suffer. I find it difficult to understand when Conservative Members seem to scoff at the fact that the patients of non-fundholding doctors have to wait. I could go on for hours about that subject alone. It is a crisis, but Conservative Members do not understand that. We are talking about thousands of patients and about primary health care.

Some people may try to blame non-fundholders and say that they should become fundholders, but I do not accept that argument. However, at present non-fundholding doctors have no choice but to apply to become fundholders. They must then wait nine months to a year to prove their accountancy abilities—although they were trained as doctors—before they are accepted.

The Government appear to have ring-fenced resources for the patients of fundholding GPs but have not done so for patients of non-fundholding doctors through the Eastern board. The Royal group of hospitals is the largest trust in Northern Ireland and has proportionately the lowest management costs in the Province. I opposed the introduction of trusts from the beginning, but I admit that in management terms the Royal group of hospitals seems to have performed its work fairly well in comparison with other establishments.

I appreciate that the Minister is currently considering an option appraisal for the Royal Maternity hospital, but I remind him that the hospital's neonatal unit serves the whole of Northern Ireland. It is a place of excellence

where all major paediatric services are located, including paediatric cardiology, nephrology and urology. The main orthopaedic hospital in the north of Ireland is Musgrave Park hospital, which is part of the Green Park Healthcare trust. The Minister has asked the boards to channel cuts towards "non-life-threatening procedures"—I think that that is the correct term—which means reductions in elective surgery.

Hip joint replacement surgery will be cut dramatically from the record-breaking total of more than 2,000 joint replacements last year. Activity will probably be reduced by 50 per cent., which will mean an increase in waiting lists—waiting time is currently less than nine months—month after month. By the end of the financial year, patients may be waiting more than two years for joint replacement surgery. Further cuts will mean the dismantling of what has become the world's leading centre for joint replacement surgery.

The Minister is conducting a cost appraisal of the cancer services at Belvoir Park hospital, and it is important that the Green Park trust is represented on the team that carries out that appraisal. Industrial action has been taken at the Downe hospital in Downpatrick and at other hospitals throughout the north of Ireland. I should point out that the private organisation Compass is able to change the contracts of support workers involved in strike action: non-negotiated contract changes are totally unacceptable.

The Ulster, North Down and Ards hospital trust has also been severely affected by the cuts. Daisy Hill hospital in Newry—in the territory of my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon)—serves all of South Down and Armagh, which is a remote rural area. The local population is implacably opposed to plans to centralise services at Craigavon area hospital. No direct public transport serves the hospital, so access is a major problem.

On what basis are decisions made to reduce the number of hospitals or to cut trust and hospital services? Are the reasons clinical, financial or professional? I should like to understand the basis of the decision making. Community trusts are also badly affected. The Eastern board has informed the North and West Belfast trust in my territory that "a phased programme of realignment"—what a lovely expression—is to be implemented. What does that mean? The board has simply used fancy words to say that services for the elderly will be greatly curtailed. The Down Lisburn trust has similar problems.

Community district nurses, community psychiatric nurses, social workers, health visitors and midwives are overworked and underpaid. They provide a magnificent service, but they are not appreciated by Government. Some such people are my patients and I have worked with others for years. They have told me their problems and I take no pleasure in recounting them today.

On 1 April this year, the British Medical Association produced a discussion paper entitled, "Financing the National Health Service". I accept Conservative Members' assertions that there must be some limits on the amount of money spent on the health service and that expenditure is based on taxation. I understand those points. The British Medical Association document raises many issues, but the two central points are: first, the national health service is grossly under-funded and needs an immediate injection of funding; secondly, work must be done on methods of forecasting future demands and health care needs.

I believe in the fundamental principles of the national health service established 50 years ago. I believe that health care should be available to all, on the basis of need and not on the basis of ability to pay or whether one is the patient of a fundholding or a non-fundholding GP.

7.54 pm

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): We all know that the Labour party is quite capable of believing its own fairytales; its decision to debate the national health service shows its inability to tell the difference between fantasy and reality. To set the scene, we should take a trip down memory lane—after all, it is the only way in which we can measure Labour's achievements in government. The 1974 Labour party manifesto promised:

"A Labour Government will expand the national health service".

Three years later, in 1977, Mr. David Ennals, Labour's Secretary of State for Health, was forced to concede:

"In the present economic climate the Government could do little more than provide for the increasing number of old people, leaving a small margin for improvements in methods of treatment".

In 1977-78, the health budget was cut by 3 per cent. in real terms and capital spending was cut by a third in real terms—the biggest, most devastating cut ever inflicted on the national health service capital programme. Those who began the NHS, who gave birth to it, have battered it more than any Tory Government—eat your heart out, Aneurin Bevan. Between 1974 and 1979, nurses' pay fell by 3 per cent. in real terms, doctors' pay fell by 16 per cent., surgeons' pay fell by 25 per cent. and waiting lists increased by 48 per cent.

The economy as a whole reflects the state of the health service. Who will forget the 83 per cent. higher rate of tax, the 26.9 per cent. inflation rate or the Chancellor of the day turning around on his way to Heathrow and being told that the International Monetary Fund was running our economy? In 1978, Dr. James Cameron, the chairman of the British Medical Association, described how

"The national health service is sick in Britain. It is inadequate and impersonal. It is losing the confidence of the medical profession and the public".

The 1978 Royal College of Nursing congress at Harrogate talked about

"a crisis of manpower, finance and morale in the service".

The national health service went on strike in 1978-79, led by the Confederation of Health Service Employees and the National Union of Public Employees. Telephonists were on strike and clinical staff manned public telephone boxes to get calls into the hospitals. Clean linen was not allowed through picket lines and foul linen was destroyed because the unions would not allow it to be taken from the hospitals to be cleaned. Meals were provided by volunteers and cleaning was non-existent.

Let us cast our minds back to the news stories of the time, which do not reveal a health service nurtured by a caring, sharing Labour Government—quite the opposite. A 1978 article in *The Times* entitled, "Hospital is to turn away patients with cancer", stated :

"Patients with breast, lung and other cancers, and abortion cases are to be turned away from the Kingston hospital, Surrey, because of industrial action by health service workers and supervisors. The hospital said yesterday, 'From midnight next Tuesday, even known cancer cases will be denied admission and lives immediately threatened. Investigative surgery, even where there is a strong suspicion of a life-threatening condition, will not take place'".

[Mr. David Evans]

Even when we wanted to bury our loved ones—who might have died outside Kingston hospital—we could not do so, because the Transport and Generai Workers Union would not let the gravediggers dig the graves. We had to keep our loved ones in our living rooms until the gravediggers went back off strike.

In her confessions, the former Secretary of State for Health, Baroness Castle, described her attack on pay beds during the winter of discontent as an "essential political sweetener" for the trade unions. The Labour party is still committed to tossing political sweeteners to trade unions. In return, the unions toss financial sweeteners to the Labour party. We know that 176 Labour Members are sponsored by unions. As the TGWU boss said, "No say, no pay."

New Labour says that it intends to turn the clock back to the bad old days of the savage 1970s. As if that were not bad enough, it intends to strip health care professionals—administrators, doctors and GPs—of their power and put it in the hands of its new regional assemblies. What a recipe for disaster. Once again, the comrades will cut care. Their motto is, "Strikes first, patients last." Yet again the Labour party refuses to listen to the views of the professionals. Instead, it plays politics with the health service.

If Labour had its way, the national health service as we know it would be destroyed. Decision making would be stripped from health care professionals and given to pompous, political shop stewards, who would tear the service apart as a result of regional, industrial and political battles.

The lot opposite should turn the clock right back and try to understand Nye Bevan's intentions for the NHS. In 1946, he said:

"I believe that democracy exists in the active participation in administration and policy. Therefore, I believe that it is a wise thing to give the doctors full participation in the administration of their own professions."

Given that statement, if Nye Bevan were still a Member of Parliament today, and he reflected on the Conservative reforms and Labour's plans, I am pretty certain that he would vote for the Government amendment at the end of the debate.

We have referred to the total disaster that was created last time Labour had power, and control of the health service and the lives of others. Let us consider what has happened since those dark days. It is an incredible story. Take GP fundholding. If all applications to join the scheme from April 1997 proceed, a further 3 million patients, and a total of 58 per cent. of the population, will be covered by GP fundholding. Since 1991, 15,000 general practitioners have joined the scheme, which is more than half of all GPs. In east Hertfordshire, which includes Welwyn Hatfield, fundholding covers 78 per cent. of the population, which is 20 per cent. more than the national average.

We are now spending on the national health service £80,000 every minute of the day. We are spending £724 a year for every man, woman and child. Total spending this year will be £42.6 billion. Spending on the national health service has increased in real terms in every year of Conservative government since 1979. The service treats 80 per cent. more acute patients than it did 17 years ago. Nurses' average earnings have increased by 70 per cent. in real terms over that period. Capital spending has increased by 66 per cent. since 1979, which is in stark contrast to the 28 per cent. reduction under the previous Labour Government. Almost £2 billion was invested in NHS buildings in 1995-96 alone.

Now we come to the heart of the matter. The number of doctors in England increased from 56,000 in 1978-79 to 81,000 in 1995. The number of nurses and midwives has increased by 55,000 since 1979. Nurses' pay has increased from £68 a week in 1979 to £311 a week in 1995, which is an increase of 70 per cent. in real terms. The number of dentists has gone up from 11,919 in 1978 to 18,668 in 1996. Infant mortality per 1,000 live births has gone down from 13.2 to 6.1. Under Labour, it went down from 16.3 to 13.2. Even more impressive is the fact that over 3 million more treatments were carried out in 1995-96 than in 1979, and over 1 million more than in 1991. In all, 10.5 million treatments are carried out each year.

That lot over there have scored many own goals, and they have scored another one tonight. The NHS is safe in our hands. The elderly are safe in our hands. The sick are safe in our hands. The surgeons are safe in our hands. The nurses are safe in our hands. The doctors are safe in our hands. The dentists are safe in our hands. Our national health service has never been fitter, faster or more effective. The only people who would benefit from that lot over there being in power are the shop stewards and their trade union bosses. Labour would do what it always does: make a total mess of it. We owe it to the nation to ensure that Labour never gets the chance.

8.6 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): In the spirit of the age—which has clearly bypassed the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans)—I shall eschew ideology and party political point scoring and, instead, talk about health care in east London.

A few weeks ago, the Royal Hospitals NHS trust launched a £300 million private finance initiative scheme for a new hospital at Whitechapel, which is to be built and run by the preferred bidder, the Health Management Group. The press launch took place in a blaze of self-congratulatory publicity, but what was not revealed was the apprehension of clinicians, consultants and junior hospital doctors. Their apprehension was set out in a letter dated 9 October 1996 to Dr. Duncan Empey, the medical director of the Royal Hospitals trust. It was signed by David MacLean, the chairman of the Royal London hospital medical council, Larry Baker, the chairman of St. Bartholomew's medical council and Mr. P. Magee, the chairman of the London chest hospital medical council.

The letter refers to the £300 million scheme. It states:

"We have heard from a large number of consultants, all of whom have been concerned that the space allocation in the new hospital for their relevant departments is smaller than they enjoy at present, and would certainly be inadequate for the planned patient flows. We were all originally promised that in the move to a single site the facilities would be equal to or better than those currently enjoyed, but this does not appear to obtain in plans from either consortium. This has caused a considerable degree of concern, and we feel that the future of the hospital as both an Accident and Emergency centre for the local population, and as a national and international centre of excellence, would be severely compromised under the available plans."

The letter continues:

"We are deeply concerned that if the issues of quality and quantity are not met, while in the short-term the Medical School and Hospital may appear to prosper, in the long-term recruitment will inevitably suffer and the quality of medical care, research and education will decline."

In my view, it takes a peculiarly incompetent Government and hospital trust to spend £300 million on a project and make things worse rather than better.

There is also considerable concern about the financial implications of the private finance initiative schemes that were referred to earlier, and particular concern about the financial end-loading of such schemes. It would seem that, in years to come, that could cause havoc to the revenue flows of the area health authority, and to the making of all its decisions. It might have to decide whether to support the PFI scheme down the years, or to stop spending money on hospital care in a variety of other local hospitals.

I am a member of the Treasury Committee. We have done some research into PFI end-loading, but I believe that more is needed. Let me make two suggestions. First, I hope that the National Audit Office will look into the matter. I know that John Bourne, who is in charge of the NAO, would like to issue guidelines on the potential dangers of the end-loading that will occur in future years. Although the NAO does not currently look into schemes that have not been completed, in order to issue guidelines it would have to do so, because there are not enough PFI schemes around. I hope that the Royal Hospitals NHS trust scheme, which is easily the biggest PFI scheme in the NHS, is be one of those that John Bourne will examine.

Secondly, the Health Committee should look at the revenue implications of PFI schemes and the dangers imposed on end-loading by the revenue flows. That must be examined in the context of the health management group in the scheme that I have mentioned asking for a rate of return no lower than 17 per cent.

As I have said, the Royal Hospitals NHS trust scheme is very big, and I feel that it is proceeding with undue haste. I believe that it is being driven by political imperatives rather than by serious medical considerations. The health management group might pause to consider that there could be a change of government early next year, and that the new Government might take a very different view of a PFI scheme that proposes, for example, to close St. Bartholomew's hospital. I see that one of its great alumni, the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) is present; I hope that he will catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The health management group might like to consider that the children of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the leader of the Labour party, were born at St. Bartholomew's. It might also like to consider that the constituents of the next Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith)—who is also present—actually use the hospital. Not only are there powerful logical, financial and medical reasons for the health management group to go a bit easy, unless it wants to wreck its own scheme and its own financial future; there are powerful emotional forces backing the retention of St. Bartholomew's as part of any PFI that eventually sees the light of day.

Another point, which relates partly to the PFI scheme, concerns the future of paediatric care in east London. We have been told that there is no crisis, but there is certainly a crisis in east London's paediatric care. Part of that crisis is set out in a document marked "Strictly Private and Confidential" which comes from Vanessa Wright, clinical director of children's services at the Royal Hospitals NHS trust. It is dated 4 September 1996. It begins:

"The financial position of the Children's Services Directorate at 31 July 1996 . . . shows a worsening overspend of £660,418, with a predicted year end out-turn of £1.366 million overspent . . . Senior management in The Royal Hospitals NHS Trust have made it abundantly clear that radical action has to be taken now to address this situation."

The overspend has knock-on effects on paediatric care at both St. Bartholomew's hospital and Queen Elizabeth hospital for children. Everyone knows that St. Bartholomew's has a world-renowned paediatric cancer service. Following the scare document produced by the Royal Hospitals NHS trust, two proposals have been made so far. The document itself suggests shutting that world-famous paediatric cancer service—which would cause a public outcry—and transferring it to Queen Elizabeth hospital for children by 31 March next year. I do not believe that that will happen; I think that there will be second thoughts.

Professor Lilleyman, however, has made an even more bizarre proposal. The professor, who has a privately financed chair at St. Bartholomew's, has proposed taking the whole unit—its facilities and patients—to Guy's hospital, south of the river. He made that proposal without the consent of the hospital for which he works. May I ask the Minister whether it is lawful for a professor with a privately financed chair to take an entire unit and its patients to another hospital without the permission of the Royal Hospitals NHS trust? I understand that Guy's is quite prepared to pinch that world-famous unit for reasons of prestige.

Even the Royal Hospitals NHS trust does not like the idea. I have spoken to its chief executive, Gerry Green, who has made it clear that if Professor Lilleyman does try to scoot off down the river with the unit, he will go without facilities, without money and, in fact, without his clothes. I understand that he has said that the professor will go in his underpants and nothing else.

It is the legality aspect that I find bizarre, as, I am sure, will every Member of Parliament. I want to ask the Minister about the future of paediatric care, without scoring any political points and without attacking the trust. I hope that he will give us a guarantee that if the Queen Elizabeth hospital, whose closure was announced three years ago, does close within the next year or so—it was originally intended to continue into the year 2000—alternative facilities will be made available before it shuts. If it does, three things will be needed.

First, the new Homerton hospital has no paediatric beds at present, although it has just appointed an ambulatory paediatric consultant. If QEH shut, 25 or 30 children's beds would be needed at Homerton, probably by next autumn. Secondly, two wards would probably have to be moved from QEH to St. Bartholomew's to complement the existing two wards. Thirdly, the shortfall in beds that would still exist would have to be made up by the provision of more children's beds at the Royal London hospital.

I have spoken to the Royal London hospital, to the chairman and chief executive of Homerton hospital and to consultants at St. Bartholomew's. I hope that the Minister can give us an assurance that, should QEH have

[Mr. Brian Sedgemore]

to close rather than stay open until 2000, the new beds will be provided at Homerton, the two new wards will be opened at St. Bartholomew's and the extra beds will be made up by more children's beds at the Royal London. Queen Elizabeth hospital is much loved, but it does not have state-of-the-art facilities. Its theatres and its diagnostic back-up are not state of the art. Unless rebuilt on its present site, it will probably be impossible to keep it open. If the Minister can give me that assurance, some use will have come out of the debate.

8.19 pm

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): Until the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) enlightened me, I did not think that I had much in common with the Leader of the Opposition. I now find that both he and I had children born at St. Bartholomew's hospital, which proves two things. We both know a good hospital when we see one and we both believe in the national health service because, for those Members who are not aware of the fact, St. Bartholomew's has never had any private beds. I was trained and I worked in the hospital as a clinician, and I am proud of its record and all that it stands for.

The Government's reforms, particularly those since 1991, have been a great success and are a cause for rightful celebration after 50 years of the NHS. I never believed that, in my professional life, the health service could claim to be world class and decentralised, with emphasis on primary care teams. For proof of the success, one need look no further than the Opposition's typical hypocrisy on all the reforms over which they have fought so vigorously. Will they abolish NHS trusts? Of course not. Will they abolish general practitioner fundholding? Of course not.

I read the words of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), soothing members of the British Medical Association—again I declare an interest—and telling us all that he is not a revolutionary. If he is ever lucky enough to hold office, he may tinker around the edges, but I suspect that the whole thing is an absolute farce and that he and his party will, in effect, continue the reforms that the Government have ably put in place.

The ultimate test is always whether patients have benefited. The answer, of course, is that they have. The figures are absolutely irrefutable. Since the reforms, patient treatments—I think that they are called episodes in modern parlance—have increased vastly, by around 1 million. Waiting lists have been reduced to their lowest level ever. All that has been achieved in the context of the oft-derided patients charter.

During the summer recess, I found myself on the receiving end in Odstock hospital, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). I cannot speak highly enough of the treatment that I received. There was none of the hanging around that I remember so well as a medical student, clinician and patient. My condition was hardly life threatening, but I was whisked from accident and emergency into theatre within an hour. On the ward, I saw nurse teamwork, which I had not always seen in the past, and excellent liaison between nurse teams as they came on and off duty.

When I was discharged from hospital—I am sure every hon. Member knows that I and my family have always been NHS patients—I was admirably looked after by my local GP fundholding practice, by its district nurse and by the community pharmacist. That was an index of what the reforms have achieved: efficiency in a caring atmosphere.

In my constituency, no less than 79 per cent. of patients are covered by GP fundholding practices. The borough of Merton, in which my constituency lies, is arguably the best served in London by NHS trust hospitals. Perhaps the service is equivalent to anything in any conurbation in the world, even though none of the four hospitals is actually situated in the borough. My hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues, however, will be aware of recent consternation in south-west London. Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority, recognised by the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), as not a profligate one, reported a financial crisis in the offing. Its proposals to counteract the potential crisis were alarming.

For instance, there was talk of non-urgent elective surgery being savagely reduced—not stopped, as the Labour Front-Bench spokesman said earlier. Inevitably, that would mean the return of longer waiting lists, which not only goes profoundly against everything that the Government have achieved, but is clearly unacceptable to patients and their families, and puts an extra financial burden on the social security budget. That litany of events has therefore caused much concern in my constituency and in the constituencies of many of my hon. Friends and of Opposition Members.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health was generous with his time in listening to our concerns. I trust that that generosity will be matched by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary when he responds—as I speak, he probably has responded. I hope that my constituents' understandable alarm will not be prolonged beyond next week's Budget statement, after which, clearly, rapid executive decisions will have to be made as to how funds are applied.

I recognise that, in winding up the debate, my hon. Friend the Minister cannot give assurances, but I emphasise the number of meetings that we have had on an all-party basis. We have had meetings with representatives from St. George's hospital, St. Helier hospital, Kingston hospital, Queen Mary's hospital, Roehampton, and Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority, its chairman and its chief executive. They have already—I congratulate them on this—found efficiency gains of some £5 million, but further savings that have been asked for of £9 million are, I believe, impractical. They have a genuine case. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has been able to pass on our concerns to his Treasury colleagues.

After that acute problem has been solved—I am confident that it will be—it would be prudent for my hon. Friends to revisit the issue of the calculation of the capitation formula for resource allocation. We all know that such formulae are beset with difficulties. In Merton, we have had awful problems with the standard spending assessment. That has affected, for instance, teachers' pay because Merton is neither a truly inner nor a truly outer London borough. All hon. Members know how complex

those calculations are, but we should revisit the matter in relation to our local health authority.

From the point of view of my constituents, I can never contemplate surrendering the potentially bright future of Nelson hospital, which is bang in the middle both of my constituency and of the borough, and for which many of us have fought so hard and so long to ensure that it has a vigorous future in Merton. It absolutely epitomises the return of the cottage hospital. We have heard talk of cottage hospitals being closed. I am delighted to tell the House that I have received assurances from the St. Helier NHS trust that, despite its financial difficulties, it believes that plans for Nelson hospital can go ahead. That will be cause for much celebration in my constituency.

Even Nelson hospital, with its proud record as a hospital in Merton, will give due deference to St. Bartholomew's hospital, for which the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch has been such a doughty fighter. For too long, I have had to live with a sense of terrible guilt about what was done to the hospital. I believe that an academic and medical act of vandalism has been carried out on that hospital, after its nearly nine centuries of being in the forefront of delivering medical care, often to the most needy people in a part of London that was never particularly privileged.

During the consultation period, in February 1995, I expressed in writing to East London and The City health authority my gut feeling that the new buildings at the Royal London hospital might never appear, or not appear to the extent that was predicted. I very much hope that I am wrong, but I suspect that my worst fears will prove to be true because of financial demands or for other very practical reasons.

I profoundly regret that I was persuaded to vote in favour of the reconstruction and the effective movement on to one site of Bart's and the Royal London hospitals. In the context of party unity, I suppose that we must all trim occasionally. I am certainly ashamed, however, that I rationalised my vote on the basis that there was never an undertaking from the Opposition that they would reverse the decision.

I am even more aggrieved that one of the arguments made about closing Bart's, to reassure me and those of my hon. Friends who had doubts about it, centred on the issue of accident and emergency facilities for the City of London. I remember being reassured by former occupants of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's office that I need have no worries, because there would be adequate cover from the accident and emergency unit at Guy's hospital. We all know what has happened since then. It seems inevitable that the accident and emergency department at Guy's will be closed and shifted to St. Thomas's hospital. Therefore, the entire argument proved to be entirely bogus. One day, I suspect that the House and those who made the decision will come to regret it.

Now there is at least some light on the horizon. I do not expect that I shall be able to make entirely common cause with the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch, but, in the past, I have criticised the City of London for being less than vigorous in its defence of St. Bartholomew's hospital. It is quite extraordinary that a body of that strength and antiquity should appear to be so inhibited in protecting such a unique—I use the word in its proper sense—hospital. Now we may be able to retrieve something positive from a disastrous situation: the Royal Hospital of St. Bartholomew Charitable Foundation. The fact that that charitable foundation has been allowed to use the word royal is significant. Its members are working with the special trustees of St. Bartholomew's hospital and the Corporation of London, forming a tripartite body of absolutely impeccable credentials.

While a decision is awaited on the private finance initiative application, which the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch mentioned, the waters continue to be muddy. I do not pretend to the House that I can predict the outcome. Perhaps we shall end up with a dual-site option, with some specialist units continuing at Bart's, or perhaps there will be a completely new and exciting opportunity for an innovative model on the Bart's site, where the public-private interface will work. It has even been suggested that there might be a private provider that will provide a community centre or even contract back into the NHS. That type of synergy sounds like a very exciting possibility. An accident and emergency department could even be reintroduced with private funding.

Those proposals could be a blueprint for the future. I do not say that any of them are in a final stage of formulation, but I beg my hon. Friend the Minister to assure the House that, whatever happens to the Bart's site in the future, he will properly involve the Royal Hospital of St. Bartholomew Charitable Foundation, the aims of which are

"To establish on the Barts site an Independent Charitable Hospital and a Medical School of International standing",

so that the fine traditions of that hospital can continue in a manner that is best suited to the century ahead.

None of us can predict with any certainty how the NHS will develop and what administrative, financial and political factors may guide it. In the future, I believe that there may even be fewer tiers. The Government have done admirable work in reducing tiers in the NHS, and there may be further radical moves that they could make. An NHS executive, for example, could deal directly with NHS trust hospitals, which might provide greater flexibility and responsiveness, always with the patients' needs at the forefront.

One matter about which I am absolutely certain is that the Labour party will always prove to be the old guard, dragging its feet until it sees that the reforms make sense. Labour Members cannot bring themselves to admit that the changes make sense and congratulate the Government on what they have achieved. That is the pattern of what has happened over the past 17 or 18 years.

Today we heard about new Labour's expenditure plans, which will certainly entail more costs, although no more patients being treated. Whether one is talking about abolishing the internal market, withdrawing the PFI, reintroducing regional health structures or ending compulsory competitive tendering, the battles have been fought and won by the Government, and the Opposition's proposals will simply ensure that money and effort will be diverted from patients. In stark contrast, no one can challenge the effectiveness, innovation and courage of the Government's initiatives.

I hope that between now and the general election, whenever it comes, the opportunity will present itself not only to continue those excellent policies, but to publicise their benefits rather more vigorously to patients and to the country.

8.36 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson–Wickes) gave a balanced speech and, while pointing out the positive aspects, expressed his concerns about what has happened with some of the reforms. I should like to share the positive note that he struck, because too often we minimise the excellent work that has been done in the national health service over the years. I am familiar with the NHS through my personal experience and as a pastor and because my family has used it, and I understand not only the good work that it has done but the changes that it has undergone. Having said that, however, I think that the Government occasionally overstress the positive side of the NHS and fail to realise that there may be problems with it.

Some years back, when he was a Health Minister, the right hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney) was answering in a very positive manner for the Government during Question Time, and I was called by Madam Speaker to ask my supplementary question. I asked, "Will the Minister accept that we are not in heaven yet?" There was a sedentary intervention from a Conservative Member, who cried out, "That's what we're trying to prevent." I understood what he meant, but the fact is that there are problems in the health service, and we should at least be dealing with them.

Earlier in the debate, it was said that, in the past, hospitals and health authorities were always able to balance their books. I wonder whether the problem today is that we have a different type of accountant, or that medical politics are being played. We are consistently told that we cannot provide services because we are already in the red. If it was possible to balance the books in the past when there were shortages in the health service, why can that not be done now? At no time have any Government been able to provide the finance to cover all the health service's demands.

Another difficulty through the years has been with changing medical practices. Some practices were held on to for too long because people were accustomed to the work, happy in their environment and not prepared to move on. At times, developments were retarded.

Rather interesting comments have been made about cutting administration costs, for which there is a place in some areas. Dr. Sandy Macara of the British Medical Association said not so very long ago that the question was not whether there should be less management; the service was happy with it. What it needed, he said, was more money. When we constantly criticise the amount spent on administration, we should bear in mind such a salutary warning, which was repeated by a recent witness to the Select Committee on Health, who claimed that more and better management was necessary to improve and co-ordinate children's health services.

On the other hand, we must fire a shot across the bows of some managers, for I am not convinced that some of them are managing well. When one bears it in mind that some of them are getting more money for a year's work than the Prime Minister of the nation, it seems that we should demand a better service from them. In previous debates both in the Province and in the House, I have asked whether it is right to give bonuses to managers for cutting down on lower-paid workers, which seems to have been happening for some time. I have very little sympathy with trusts anywhere, especially in Northern Ireland, when they make ancillary workers redundant to save money, yet increase managers' salaries. I shall illustrate that point with regard to one of the finest hospitals in the United Kingdom.

I have a letter from a person in North Down, a copy of which he sent to the hospital's chief executive. It said:

"I visited a friend who is a patient in ward 17 . . . and found that she and others on the ward were on beds that did not have sheets, pillowcases or indeed any proper bed covers. When I enquired why this was so my friend advised that the laundry had not been received, this was at 4.00 pm!!

I find this totally appalling and unacceptable. I realise that it has been necessary to implement cuts in the health service but surely the people who are ill deserve to receive humane treatment, and that includes clean bedding."

I had had experience of such a problem earlier when I raised a similar issue with the management.

I share the concerns of the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron), who referred to the letter that the medical director of the trust wrote to general practitioners in October, which said:

"elective activity for patients of non fund holding medical practices"—

within the board area—

"will be ceasing".

I am not convinced that the question is simply one of giving preferential treatment to GP fundholders, for I am reminded constantly that emergency work and other types of serious surgery are still paid for—even that of GP fundholders—by the boards and regional authorities.

There is an experiment in total fundholding at the moment. Given last year's experiences, it seems that there is a tendency to go ahead with spending the money that is available from GP fundholding, in the knowledge that at the year end the boards will be able to provide extra money because they have saved it. Have the Government rightly been blamed for gross underfunding, when no one—from my party, other Opposition parties, the BMA or anybody else—has said what amount is needed adequately to provide what is demanded of the NHS? Those who constantly criticise the health service will have to address that issue realistically.

At the same time, I am not prepared to accept the explanations of the Department and of others in Northern Ireland who blame the shortage in health care and other areas on what they call the "disturbances" of the summer. As I understand it, all the budgets were set before the summer. Unless the Minister and the Department employed the services of Mystic Meg, I do not know how they foresaw that perceived disturbances in the summer would have an impact on the budget. I refute such an allegation, especially bearing in mind the fact that the Consolidated Fund does not include security matters. Indeed, we are regularly told in appropriation debates that we should not be referring to the security budget. The 3 per cent. cut was changed to 1.5 per cent. when the Minister realised that such a cut could not be made.

Concerns are being raised—I have heard the Minister and others speak of them—that capital investment might be cut to feed current expenditure. That would be deplorable and short-sighted, bearing in mind the fact that it has been pointed out in the debate that, under a former Administration, there was no funding of capital building for years. It takes a long time to catch up on such capital

expenditure. It therefore seems that such cuts would ultimately add to unnecessary expense in the long run. I am convinced, however, that there is still a case to be made for efficiency savings, while at the same time providing the extra funding that is needed to meet the shortfall because medical, surgical and other establishments are developing new forms of treatment. They are expensive, but in the long run they will add to the quality of life for patients and for the rest of the people.

Having spoken of the large improvement in the health of our nation and praised ourselves for it, we should ask: why is there suddenly a spate of emergency admissions? Is it as a result of self-interest, as people try to add to demands on their budgets, in order to demand more money from the Treasury for their particular speciality or trust? We are all competing in the same field.

8.47 pm

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): It is a great pleasure to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this important health service debate. Hon. Members on both sides of the House know only too well that sometimes, as a result of commitments in this place to Standing Committees, and so on, it is not always possible to be present for all the debate. I sincerely apologise to the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, and to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health for—unusually for me—not being able to be here as a result of service in a Committee earlier this afternoon.

The debate has been interesting. As I look across the Chamber and along the Conservative Benches—although to a place perhaps a little detached—it is pleasing to see that we not have not only Members who represent English constituencies but our friends from Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is very much an integral part of the United Kingdom, and it is entirely right that Northern Ireland Members should contribute to the debate. I regret that, in the unlikely event of there ever being a Labour Government, devolution plans will carve up the country, and who knows what will transpire.

In an interesting and forthright speech, which we have come to expect from him, my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) read out what to me was an appalling record, and an indictment, of the last Labour Government.

My constituency should have had its brand new hospital in the 1970s. The references made by my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield to the Chancellor rushing to the airport and then having to come back to London and the crisis surrounding this country having to go cap in hand to the International Monetary Fund struck a chord with me, because the new hospital in which I have been a patient and which many of my constituents use, should have been built in the 1970s but was not, because the capital building programme was cut by one third by the Labour Government. My constituents had to wait for the election of a Conservative Government before progress could be made.

In the same vein as other hon. Members, I should like to refer to some of my personal experiences of the national health service and make a couple of points on national issues, as well as referring to one particularly important local issue for Southport. I know that one or two other hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall be brief.

I do not propose to repeat most of the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield in his early remarks. However, when I receive a critical letter from a constituent about the health service, I shall send them a copy of his speech, which sets out only too well the record of the 1970s. As my hon. Friend said, there is no better way to see what may happen in future than looking at how people have acted in office in the past.

I have been fortunate in having been in hospital on only a couple of occasions. Touch wood, I have had good health, apart from when my career in the Gordon Highlanders was cut short and I had to be invalided out; and, more recently, during the Maastricht debates. I do not know whether it was because we seemed to be going through the night rather a lot, but I remember turning up for what I thought would be a routine meeting of about 30 minutes with the chairman of my local NHS trust in 1993, and coming out of intensive care seven days later.

I pay tribute to the professionalism and care of all the staff and administrators at the Southport and Formby Community Services trust. I am sure that the quality of health care provided to my constituents by one of the country's flagship trusts is reflected in other parts of the country. What my hon. Friends have already said proves that.

The difficulties in and around my constituency are, in some ways, the difficulties of success. As a result of the Government's policies and the year-on-year real-terms increases in health service spending, we have a couple of pretty new hospitals five miles apart. Over the past few months, two local health authorities—South Lancashire and Sefton—have conducted a public consultation exercise on their plans to put particular specialist services in one hospital or the other. The advice of the clinicians—not the bureaucrats—has been that, to maintain important services such as cancer services, there must be centres of excellence throughout the region, never mind throughout the country.

With two new hospitals not far apart, tough decisions sometimes have to be made. One difficulty of having two health authorities is that sometimes, for the wrong reasons, bureaucracy can take over. The provision for my constituents and those of the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall), who, unfortunately, cannot be here for this debate because of important engagements elsewhere, has been the subject of a review, because the two authorities have not been able to agree on what to do. Because they could not decide which services should be concentrated on one site, they decided to commission Sir Duncan Nichol, the former chief executive of the national health service, to undertake a report. He decided that there should be a hot site and a cold site. He then decided that the hot site should be in Southport, and the cold site in Ormskirk.

Unfortunately, in spite of having commissioned the report, the two health authorities were still not able to agree on implementing its recommendations. I understand perhaps more than most the sensitivities of the issue, but, as others have pointed out, it was as a sop to those in the Ormskirk area that the two authorities decided that, although all the services would go to Southport, a new maternity unit would be based in Ormskirk.

That process has got no further, because a petition was put together with more than 20,000 signatories. It was concocted by several local people with a passionate and genuine interest in the continued provision of local maternity services in Southport. They did not want those services to go five miles down the road to Ormskirk.

[Mr. Matthew Banks]

Unfortunately, as so often happens, one or two local politicians jumped on the bandwagon of what had, until then, been a non-political public debate. One in particular, a local councillor by the name of Ronnie Fearn, who is known to hon. Members, decided to take hold of the petition, saying that it would be safe in his hands, and he would present it to the health authority. So safe was it in his hands and so competent was he that he presented it to the wrong people. They had to put it in a brown envelope, put some stamps on it and send it to the health authority that was conducting the review.

The point of that story is that neither of the community health councils, made up of local people, has been prepared to object to the health authority's proposals. We have a problem if local people on the community health council are not prepared to oppose plans that concern so many people in my constituency.

As I have made clear once before, I believe that the way to make progress on this constituency difficulty is to try to bring all the health services in Southport on to one site. The way forward is certainly through the private finance initiative. I am pleased that the Southport and Formby Community Services trust is undertaking pioneering work in that respect on new buildings.

There is one further piece in the jigsaw that I should like to see in future. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will listen to my plea for him to consider closely the arguments that I am putting now, and shall put again in writing, for a special capital allocation, perhaps through the regional health authority, to ensure that the services at Southport general infirmary, which is now very old, can be moved to the new hospital site at Kew. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to give me a positive response to that request at the end of the debate.

As other hon. Members wish to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will conclude simply by saying this: the record of the last Labour Government was such that we cannot trust the health service in Labour hands in the next Parliament. My constituents should have had their new hospital in the 1970s. We did not have it, because the Government of the day had to go cap in hand to the International Monetary Fund after they had bankrupted us. We had to wait for the election of a Conservative Government, and I have no doubt that, as far as local health services are concerned, the best interests of my constituents are served by the re-election of this Conservative Government.

8.58 pm

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): We have heard a pretty remarkable display of complacency from Conservative Members, who have suggested that any criticism of the national health service is a slur on the service, or even shroud waving. Conservative Members seem to think that Labour Members are the only people who are worried about the current situation in the NHS. If that were so, it would not really matter, but it is not. Conservative Members should listen more to their constituents and to the staff who work in the service.

Much praise has been directed towards the staff from both sides of the House and I certainly want to add my voice to that. I admire the devotion of most people who work in the NHS, who are expressing their worries in no uncertain terms. Their devotion is often taken advantage of. I worry about their work load, and they are often underpaid. At the moment, they have to waste time, effort and money in local negotiations, causing a completely wasteful duplication of effort, whose only purpose is to play one area and one worker off against another. That is nothing to be proud of, and it is certainly not efficient.

People who work in the NHS do not complain only, or even mainly, about their pay. I think that all hon. Members will have received the briefing from the Royal College of Nursing, which states:

> "The RCN has conducted two surveys of accident and emergency units in 1994 and 1996. Last winter our survey results showed that nearly half the A and E units monitored still had patients waiting overnight on trolleys."

The RCN is not casting a slur on the NHS. Its members work in the NHS, and I believe that they are proud of it. They are not proud when patients have to spend many hours on trolleys.

The management of the Preston Acute Hospitals NHS trust were not casting a slur on the national health service when they recently expressed to me their great worry and unease that the private finance initiative, at least as it is presently constituted, would remove from them the control that they should have over future hospital development. Theirs was a thoughtful appraisal of something that will have a long-term effect; it was not casting slurs or shroud waving. We ignore such expressions of concern at our peril.

Of course, Conservative Members are too busy filling the airwaves with claims that more and more people are being treated. All sorts of somewhat spurious statistics are put before us. In the figures used by the Government Front-Bench team, it is not patients who are measured, but finished consultant episodes. Those are not necessarily the same as people. The Government should spend more time and effort trying to collect meaningful statistics—for example, for the league tables that rate hospitals one against another, which are important, as they can greatly affect which hospitals attract contracts. Often it is not the most vital things that are measured.

Why not do as the RCN suggests, and collect information about the incidence of hospital-acquired infections? That would be a measure of hospital efficiency, and it would be a great deal more meaningful.

Day care is another item that has to be considered. We are all in favour of day surgery units for appropriate use. I recently had the pleasure of opening a day surgery unit at the Royal Preston hospital. As a member of the Select Committee on Health, I have questioned Ministers about how they define day surgery units, and have discovered that they count only those that send people home in the evening; so, if a hospital prefers to have a unit that provides overnight recovery beds, it is not counted as a day surgery unit, yet that unit can use its facilities far more efficiently, because the whole day is available equally for operations and procedures.

In other units, less recovery time is available as the day wears on, so only more minimal procedures can be carried out in the afternoon; yet a hospital that considers that and decides to have overnight beds will not be counted as providing day surgery, and will suffer in the league tables and when purchasers consider awarding contracts.

In the national health service, we have to consider equity according to age and equity according to geography, among other issues. The national health

service is not truly national and equitable across geographical areas. I shall give an example that works in favour of my area in the north-west. Far more multiple sclerosis patients in the north-west than in any other area are treated with a new drug, which can be extremely useful in certain circumstances but which is undeniably expensive. I do not believe for a moment that that is because the profile of multiple sclerosis sufferers in the north-west is fundamentally different from that of those in the rest of the country; it is an example of geographical inequity.

It may be that other health authorities do things that are not done in the north-west, but the differences stem not from local accountability to people but from a lack of strategic planning and overall consideration of people's needs. If clinical need were the guide, geography would not normally be, as it often is, the deciding factor in whether or for whom treatment was available.

I reinforce what my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said about mixed sex wards. I, too, believe that they are an affront to the dignity of patients, and cause a great deal of distress. I also believe that to cause distress to patients is to be inefficient. Those who consider beds and people as though the people were merely pawns to be moved around are not doing their care any favours. My hon. Friend dealt extremely well with the subject of mixed sex wards, but he did not make particular mention of psychiatric wards. I believe that mixed sex psychiatric wards are especially obnoxious and worrying.

There is much talk about value for money, and I agree entirely that we should obtain it, but that cannot be done if people are treated and cared for by staff who are not appropriately trained; yet that is the case for many of our children.

There is a shortage of paediatricians and other child-trained clinicians in our hospitals. I am shocked that paediatrics is regarded as a Cinderella specialty. Children form a quarter of our population, and what happens to them when they are sick can affect them all their lives. To achieve efficiency, we must ensure good and appropriate treatment for children. Half the children in hospital are in adult wards. That is a disgrace. I do not think that one Conservative Member has mentioned children. That is typical of our neglect of that quarter of the population in health matters.

Many of our sick children, including children with complex disabilities, are now cared for at home. It is especially important to examine the care available for them. They need a community children's nursing service, but in half the country there is no such service. As adults, we expect trained nurses—district and community nurses—to be available. They give us wonderful service. Children have equal need, and should have an equal right to a nursing service trained for their special care, yet half the country has no such service.

Only 10 per cent. of the country has a 24-hour nursing service. Conservative Members who are pointing at their watches should desist. I have sat here for many hours; none of them has been here for as long as I have. It speaks volumes that it is while I am talking about our children and telling the House some uncomfortable facts about how we do not look after them properly, that I am interrupted.

Only 10 per cent. of the country has a 24-hour children's community nursing service. That means that 90 per cent. of parents with kids who may have complex difficulties or be terminally ill have no district nurse to call on who is trained to look after children. In the whole country, there are only about 400 such nurses. More urgently need to be trained, and then employed to provide that service. Without appropriately trained staff, we do not get value for money.

I also suggest that we would get value for money if we gave better support to voluntary organisations such as Home-Start, which exists to support families with needs, often health needs. It is wrong that, when people are willing to give time and effort to voluntary work, they should be given the overwhelming burden of perpetual fund-raising. If we are trying to get the best value from every pound expended by the state, we should direct more money at organisations such as Home-Start.

A Conservative Member said that a strong economy was the fundamental need. Of course I agree with that, but it is rich coming from a Government who have presided over constant high unemployment and the destruction of our manufacturing industry. It is not only to provide the wherewithal that we need a strong economy. Economic and social problems make people's health worse, so it is important that we have a strong economy with people in work, because, if people are unemployed, they suffer more sickness.

It is important that we devote our resources to a fairer society. For example, old people still suffer cold in the winter. That is something which I am trying to remedy by the modest Bill I presented today. Let us have a strong economy with the right priorities, so that we have a fairer society. A fairer society is a healthier society.

9.14 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): The hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) has allowed me only five minutes, because I know that those on the Front Benches wish to start summing up at about 9.20 pm.

The hon. Lady says that statistics are meaningless, yet, like so many other Opposition Members, she presented a tirade of criticisms of the national health service. The NHS, which is the largest employer in the United Kingdom, is certainly not perfect. Of course it is not. There will always be room for improvement. However, my local chairman always said to me, "If you want to know how the health service is doing, ask someone who has been a patient." That is extremely good advice.

I shall talk briefly about the NHS generally, but more particularly in Lichfield, which I have the honour to represent as part of my constituency. The overriding statistic that Opposition Members choose to ignore is that, in 1979, in the last few months of the Labour Administration, 25 per cent. of all patients waiting for treatment had to wait for hospital treatment for over a year. Now, in 1996, there has been a reduction to only 0.4 per cent. Instead of one in four patients, it is now one in 250 waiting for hospital treatment for longer than one year. Surely that is something of which we must be proud.

The right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) said that the acid test of how well the health service is doing is the number of patients who are being treated. In that respect, too, even by the right hon. Gentleman's criterion,

[Mr. Michael Fabricant]

the Government have passed the test. More patients are being treated in primary care and in hospitals than ever before.

Premier Health trust, which is based in Lichfield, runs the Victoria hospital in Lichfield. Waiting times at that hospital have been reduced to the shortest time ever. The majority of patients with non-urgent problems are seen within four weeks for their first appointment. That enables more patients than ever before to be treated.

A rehabilitation unit has been operating for the past 18 months. It provides more appropriate services in responding to need in Lichfield, where previously patients had to go to Birmingham, Sutton Coldfield, Burton or Stafford.

The Victoria hospital has introduced an abdominal ultrascan unit. Since July 1994, when it was introduced, the number of patients scanned has doubled. Obstetric scanning was introduced at the beginning of 1995, enabling mothers to be scanned locally rather than travelling to the district general hospital. The minor injuries unit is meeting patient charter standards for the first time this year.

I am impressed by the number of consultants who now go to the Victoria hospital to treat patients. In the old days, under the old NHS scheme which Labour would like to preserve in aspic, it was always the patients who had to follow the consultants. We now see the consultants following the patients. In the out-patients department of the Lichfield Victoria hospital, 51 consultants are attending each week. For day cases, there are 20 visiting consultants in five different specialties, whereas previously patients would have to travel to Burton, Stafford, Sutton Coldfield or Birmingham.

We have heard cant, hypocrisy and soundbite from Opposition Front Benchers; but when they are asked how much more money Labour will give to support the NHS, they are silent. When Labour is asked how it will restructure the NHS, its Front Benchers are silent. When Labour is asked precisely how it will replace GP fundholding, its Front Benchers are silent. Most telling of all, when Labour is asked how it can defend its stewardship of the NHS under the last Labour Government, when NHS expenditure was cut by more than 30 per cent., Labour Front Benchers fidget and remain silent.

Labour's soundbites cannot guarantee the wealth of the nation, nor the safety of the NHS. As the right hon. Member for Livingston said, the acid test is how many patients are being treated. This Government—this Conservative Government—have passed that test.

9.20 pm

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): I begin by declaring an interest: I have for four years been a member of the parliamentary panel of the Royal College of Nursing.

In winding up the debate, I want to address three issues. The first is the damaging gap between what is actually happening in hospitals up and down the country and the fantasy world in which the Secretary of State and other Ministers believe. Secondly, I shall address the way in which the internal market and fundholding have destroyed a founding principle of our national health service: that patients are treated according to their need, not their ability to pay or any other consideration. Finally, I shall address the transformation of the culture of the national health service as a result of Government reforms from a public service culture to one that apes that of a commercial organisation.

The debate has demonstrated beyond doubt the scale of the crisis facing our health service this winter. We have heard eloquent evidence from my hon. Friends the Members for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) and for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) about the real difficulties facing their constituents in securing treatment this winter. We have heard my hon Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) describe the great fears of his constituents about the pre-emption of revenue by the large private finance initiative scheme in east London.

We also heard a surprising confession from the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes), regretting his failure to join us in opposing the devastation of London hospitals four years ago. He eloquently described the medical and academic vandalism that was inflicted at that time—a loss to the capital's medical resources that will be hard to recover.

I want to pick up the reference made by my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) to the iniquity of mixed sex wards and underline the enormous concern about the persistence of such wards in psychiatric hospitals. About 50 per cent. of women who are admitted to psychiatric hospitals have, at some time, been victims of sexual abuse. Research has shown that and shown how damaging to their well-being is the fear of vulnerability to and the possibility of sexual attack while in hospital. There is an urgent need to phase out mixed sex wards and the experiences of women in psychiatric hospitals and of men and women in general wards bear testament to that.

More than anything else, the way in which this winter's crisis has been debated today has marked a clear dividing line between Government and Opposition. Ours is no longer a health service that treats people according to their clinical need—examples from throughout the country have emphasised that. The Government have created that set of circumstances and now shrug off responsibility, saying that the circumstances result from local decision.

The NHS is fast becoming an emergency-only service—a safety net service for those who are acutely ill, while waiting lists lengthen. The crisis—the uncertainty that has been created for patients this winter—is being managed by nods and winks.

We hear reports that regions are telling trusts not to pay creditors after February, as a way to tide things over. I am happy to give way to the Minister if he can confirm that the Government do not intend to break the agreement that creditors are paid within 30 days. I see that the Minister does not wish to answer that point.

Regions are telling trusts that waiting lists should be allowed to lengthen, and that decisions as to how to manage the crisis are down to local managers, so that those who are responsible for the shambles—Ministers—stay as far from blame as possible. It amounts to something when the chief executive of the national health service executive sends a letter to trusts about handling the winter crisis, stating emphatically that it is not a new set of instructions or requirements.

Making the noise, as it is termed, is left to the Secretary of State, as he briefs the media and persuades Tory-supporting chairs of trusts to join his new NHS Network, using their position as public appointees for naked electioneering.

Someone who obviously is not a member of the Tory good news brigade is the chair of the Queens Medical Centre, Nottingham, University Hospital NHS trust. As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) said, he has been vocal in expressing his anxieties about his trust's capacity to treat patients this winter.

What is happening at the Queens medical centre in Nottingham helps us to understand the distortions in the health service. On 1 November, the centre stopped taking any routine elective admissions from non-fundholding GPs. As only 23 per cent. of Nottingham's population is covered by fundholders, 77 per cent. of the population now cannot have surgery unless they can be admitted as an emergency. That means that the centre has empty beds, so nearby Derbyshire, where 90 per cent. of GPs are fundholders, is referring its patients for treatment in the empty beds.

In 1990, the reforms were introduced with much-vaunted claims that the money would follow the patient. Patients now follow the money—where their GPs are fundholders. The chances of getting elective surgery done before next April are increasingly remote anywhere in the country unless a person is the patient of a fundholder, regardless of what is wrong with him.

King's College hospital provides a local example of the two-tier national health service, described as "an everyday reality" by Derek Smith, the chief executive. At the public meeting earlier this year, he said:

"Having succeeded in driving down waiting lists for all patients to twelve months it is with regret that we now see waiting times rising again for patients from Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham. We are a national and regional centre of excellence but we live and work at the centre of our local community from which patients have longer waits than those from outside the area.

This is in effect a two-tier NHS . . . In the last few years King's has seen major expansion and development as part of an ongoing modernisation programme. We have new, high-tech facilities such as our day surgery centre which is under-used while there are patients on waiting lists that it can care for."

A surgeon at King's College hospital, which treats my constituents, recently sent me a letter that had been circulated to all senior registrars, registrars and consultants in the surgery and critical care groups. They are working closely with the marketing department to attract additional ECRs and fundholding GP activity. They are concerned to draw attention to the clinical urgency of some of the cases that will face extended waits as a result of insufficient contract volumes. That is especially pronounced in neurology, where many cases involve following up, treating or diagnosing cancer.

The vascular clinic will now, on Wednesday mornings and Friday afternoons, book in only the patients of GP fundholders and extra-contractual referrals. I should like Ministers to tell me how I can justify all that to my constituents.

Of course people suffer as a result. The need for routine surgery becomes a necessity for emergency treatment when, for instance, a man with angina has a heart attack, or a man with prostate problems becomes unable to pass urine. A cardiologist in Bedfordshire recently observed that his patients waiting for heart surgery are more likely to die on the waiting list than they are to die of the operation.

There is another inequity in the system. Fundholding GPs do not have to meet the costs of emergency treatment for their patients. As emergencies increase, therefore, the costs are a further drain on the resources of health authorities, not fundholders. So health authorities are faced with an increasing number of emergencies and with meeting, where possible, the costs of elective surgery for the patients of non-fundholding GPs.

All this represents more broken promises. Moorfields Eye hospital has just extended its out-patient waiting time to 26 weeks, in clear breach of the patients charter standard of 13 weeks.

This may be bad news for patients; it is certainly good news for private providers and the insurance companies, for which insecurity and lengthening waiting lists are the best possible recruiting sergeants. Increasing numbers of people are paying twice for their health care. What is so damaging is that no one in the Conservative party takes the problem seriously. The Government live in a world of make-believe. Most recently, the Secretary of State published a White Paper setting out, as he called it, his credo for the national health service. In it we read fairy tales about the triumphs of the NHS. There have certainly been some triumphs, but they are achieved by the dedication of staff—despite, not because of, this Government.

The White Paper failed to mention elderly patients waiting on trolleys or patients re-admitted after premature discharge—or lengthening waiting lists, cancelled operations or the winter crisis. All these are the daily facts of life for staff and patients alike. Furthermore, there was no mention of those great Government icons: competition and the market. The Government believe that they have been a howling success. They should perhaps take seriously the findings of the recent "British Social Attitudes" survey. When asked whether they thought that the health service had improved, 81 per cent. of those interviewed said that they saw no improvement and 49 per cent. believed that things had got worse or much worse.

Mr. Fabricant: Is the hon. Lady aware of the poll of patients who had recently been treated by the health service, over 80 per cent. of whom said that they thought the health service had improved in the past few years? Is she not merely reflecting Labour party propaganda? How effective that has been in convincing people who have not been treated that the health service is not successful.

Ms Jowell: The hon. Gentleman makes my point. There is a view of reality that is shared by Conservative Members, and there is the real world outside, across the bridge at St. Thomas's hospital, at King's College hospital, Guy's hospital and Chase Farm hospital.

At the root of all that is the fact that the Tories do not really believe in the national health service. They voted against it 50 years ago. They have come to see it as inevitable, but they do not see it as desirable. The Secretary of State continues to protest that his intentions are good. Perhaps they are; let us give him the benefit of the doubt. But the truth is that his heart is not in it. For the Conservatives, state medicine is like state education: the odd hon. Member may use it, but most do not.

[Ms Jowell]

At Richmond house, where the Secretary of State sits, in a world where the raw pain and hard choices are sanitised, and where management-speak has taken over from patient care, a particular language is spoken. Nasty words such as "patients", "pain" and "waiting lists" have been eliminated from the vocabulary.

I was recently sent a copy of the minutes of the management board, the most senior board responsible for the NHS. One need read no further than those minutes to understand that patients have simply been written out of the script. Nowhere in the long deliberations of that meeting are patients mentioned. My hon. Friend the Member for Preston made the point that the Government no longer speak about patients, but speak instead about finished consultant episodes.

To give the House a flavour of the way in which the board speaks, I quote from the document. It states:

"The Board considered the areas of the country which faced the most difficulties. It agreed that support must be given to the NHS to manage through these problems without impacting on the many improvements already achieved. . . A more open position on prioritising was inevitable."

What on earth does that mean?

There is no mention of patients in the letters sent to trusts and health authorities about the winter crisis. The NHS is aping the culture of a commercial organisation and failing both patients and staff in the process.

I received a letter today from the Royal College of Midwives expressing great concern at the fact that "Changing Childbirth" was becoming less viable. That is supported by both sides of the House as the way forward in maternity care. "Changing Childbirth" is threatened by the recruitment and retention crisis hitting midwifery.

The people of this country will have to get through this winter. There will be heartache and anger as clinical priorities are determined by the crude mechanisms of a false market. In the spring there will be a general election. That will be the last chance for our national health service.

Labour will rid the health service of the dogma-driven reforms foisted on it by the Government. It will mend the fractures that have shattered the NHS into hundreds of small businesses. We will rebuild a health service in which our constituents can have confidence and of which the country can again be proud.

9.38 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): The hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) had an opportunity to set out some of her party's policies, as the country approaches an election, about the future of the national health service, but we heard absolutely nothing about what the Labour party would do. The same was also true of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who opened the debate.

The emptiness of the Labour party and its policies on the national health service characterised the debate. All that the hon. Lady did in winding up the debate was to reiterate threats about the privatisation of the NHS and the hidden agenda for the NHS that the Government were supposed to have in 1979, 1983, 1987, 1992 and 1997. The hon. Lady will doubtless make the same speech about our hidden agenda when we come up for re-election again in 2002, still supporters of our national health service.

Our future for the NHS is contained in "secret documents" called White Papers, which appear in public and are debated. It also appears in things called Bills, which come before the House—currently before the House of Lords—in terms of bringing forward primary care. It is astonishing that not one Opposition Member even bothered during the debate to mention what is at the centre of the debate on our health service today—the future of a primary care-led NHS—and that a Bill has been presented to Parliament. Not a word did we hear from Labour Members about that, what their thoughts about it were and how they would take it forward. We will talk about that later in my speech, I promise.

We also failed to hear the Labour party's pledge on spending. Again, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury totally refused to match the promise that made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and repeated by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Chris Smith: How much?

Mr. Malone: It is a real-terms increase year on year on year for the next Parliament, just as we have done in this Parliament and in the Parliaments before that. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that getting down to specifics on health spending will do him any good, he should look at the record of the last Labour Government. Not only was that pledge not honoured in its final years, but—for the first time in the history of the health service, I believe—the percentage of gross domestic product spent on health care in this country slipped from 4.8 per cent. to 4.7 per cent. The figure has now been increased to 5.9 per cent.

Mr. Smith: Can the Minister confirm two things? First, will he confirm that the percentage of GDP currently spent on the national health service is less than it was at the general election in 1992? Secondly, will he confirm that the last Labour Government raised national health service spending by more in real terms in its five years than has happened in the past five years?

Mr. Malone: The hon. Gentleman made much of his party's custody of the health service while Labour was in Government. In Government, we have gone from 4.7 per cent. of GDP to 5.9 per cent. The hon. Gentleman cannot fudge that.

It beggars belief that, even in the winding up of the debate, when the hon. Gentleman intervenes he does not take the opportunity to repeat or match the pledge that the Prime Minister has given. The hon. Gentleman made much of Red Book figures—outline figures—and the House knows that they are not normally the figures lit upon at the end of the day. He said that a 0.1 per cent. increase in health spending in real terms was tiny. If that is so, will he now pledge to match even that minimalist amount in real terms spending on the health service if he were in Government? I invite him to do so now, but he will not, as I am sure that the House will have recognised.

The truth is that the Tories are now running the agenda on the NHS. That is what I believe that the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), Labour's spin doctor, may well have said. I can hear it characterising the debate. "Come on, Chris. The Tories are running the agenda on the NHS. Even if we can't promise anything—and you

can't promise anything—let's simply declare a crisis." After all, that is what the Labour party has done for 17 years, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that it has not done the Labour party any good.

Many right hon. and hon. Members have participated in the debate. I shall refer to a number of the contributions and try to answer the points that were made.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) was Secretary of State for Social Services for six years and he drew on that extensive experience in his speech. He pointed out that trust hospitals are able to respond to problems, and he used a constituency example to illustrate very clearly how trusts can make rapid changes in order to improve service provision.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) raised two points. First, he referred to mental health and asked whether the Government consider it a priority. I assure him that we do. In the current year, £95 million in additional revenue has been devoted to improving mental health services—£53 million from health authorities, £10 million from the mental health challenge fund, £10 million in matching health authority funding, and £20 million from the mental illness specific grant, plus a £2 million contribution from local authorities. I hope that he will accept that as proof of our earnest intentions and our acceptance of mental health as a priority.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned backlog maintenance. That figure must be put in perspective, as it represents only 3 per cent. of the replacement cost of NHS estates. He should bear in mind also the fact that the NHS is responsible for more than 700 listed buildings, which is more than the National Trust.

The hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) highlighted problems with the South and East Wales Ambulance NHS trust. I assure him that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is taking a close interest in the matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Rowe) mentioned a primary care-led NHS and set out the improvements that that will bring—including quicker access and new clinics located closer to patients. The legislation that is currently before Parliament will encourage further developments in that area. It embraces the principle that patient care should take place closer to the patient where that is clinically appropriate. Although Labour Members said nothing about it, the move is welcomed by the medical profession and by those who are involved in primary care delivery.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) raised two points. First, he asked what was happening at the Queens Medical Centre NHS trust. That trust is increasing the treatment that it provides, and the number of cases rose by 2.2 per cent. last year. Trusts up and down the country are facing pressures and difficulties, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will view current events in the context of an overall increase in treatment. Secondly, the allocation for his local health authority increased by £15 million last year—which is the largest percentage increase in the Trent region.

The hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) made the very good point that we must follow policies with real finance. In so doing, he put the Labour party on the spot as he clearly understands that there can be no pledges regarding the health service unless they are followed with real cash commitments. He raised several other matters that are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and I shall ensure that they are drawn to his attention.

I do not usually enjoy the contributions of the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell), but I think that he has been taking tablets to relieve his gloom because there was some optimism in his speech when he referred to positive primary care developments and hospital improvements in his constituency. I thought that we might be persuading him to our point of view, but, sadly, the clouds soon gathered again. Despite his praise for the health service, he raised several specific points. He referred to increased intensive care and high dependency bed provision. West Yorkshire is allocating £4 million to achieve that increase and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced measures earlier this year to increase the number of paediatric intensive care beds by 20 per cent.

Mr. Gunnell *rose—*

Mr. Malone: I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman may raise a specific point with me later, but I must make progress now.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) vigorously attacked the Labour party's lack of policies. I agree with him, as today Opposition Members again indulged in shroud-waving. My hon. Friend referred to *The Independent* article attacking Labour, and pointed out correctly that we have taken over the health care agenda, which the Labour party always claimed for itself.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) asked for specific reassurances about the future of the Bart's site. As he knows, the matter is being considered by a committee that is due to report in the not too distant future. He will be kept up to date with developments in that important area.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Malone: I am afraid that I do not have time.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) asked about managers who receive salaries that are disproportionate to the task involved. The salary of an individual NHS trust chief executive is a matter for the committee of that trust. He also asked about emergency admissions. Concern about that has been expressed, and the problem is not explained by looking at the situation across the service. However, the matter is being investigated. Good management can often cope with an unexpected rise in emergency admissions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) raised a constituency point about a private finance initiative. He asked for my assurance that I would keep the matter under review. I will watch developments in his constituency. I understand how important this is to him: he is a great campaigner on behalf of his constituents, and draws such matters to the attention of Ministers. I promise him that I will keep it well within my view.

The hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) raised a point that deserves the House's attention. She talked about the number of finished consultant episodes as if it was a magic figure that was irrelevant. I remind her—and perhaps the House—of their history. She may have forgotten that the move towards finished consultant

[Mr. Malone]

episodes as a true measure of performance in the NHS was recommended by the working group chaired by Edith Körner. The hon. Lady may also have forgotten that the then Department of Health and Social Security, in its consultation document, proposed a joint steering group to examine this matter, which was established in February 1979. It was welcomed by Labour's Royal Commission on the national health service, which said:

"Improvements in information will initially require additional expenditure on administration but we expect the quality of decision making would thereby be much improved."

A journalist called Ann Clwyd happened to be a member of that commission.

The use of proper statistics was put in place by a Labour Government and was carried on by the Körner committee. They are the truest measure of NHS activity. It does the hon. Lady and her hon. Friends no good at all to denigrate the increased activity of the NHS by saying that the statistics are false. They are not. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury said that this was a Labour idea in the first place. Similarly, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) keeps telling us that the private finance initiative was his idea in the first place. On investigation, it seems that finished consultant episodes started off their life in the dying days of a Labour Government.

Labour Members did not touch on their plans for the future of the health service. They were silent on that. They tried their usual trick of denigrating the achievements of people in the health service. They set those achievements at naught.

Let me set out what I think people take as the true benchmarks of the success of a national health service, and the benchmarks of a Government's commitment to it. First, I shall deal with the work force. How many more nurses are there in the health service since the Government entered office in 1979? There are 55,000 more nurses, which is not the figure that Labour Members consistently peddle, even though they have been told time and again that their figures and the basis on which they are calculated are false. If the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury wants to test me further, I can tell him that since the reforms there has been a smaller increase of 1,000 or 2,000, so he is wrong on that as well.

The number of hospital staff has increased from 48,590 to 55,350, which is a huge increase. That investment in the medical profession has been financed as a result of the Government's determined efforts. Let us pick another benchmark that Labour Members are always keen to talk about when it suits them—waiting times. It is absurd to use the overall number of people who are waiting for operations as the benchmark of the health service's success. As a service grows, and as more and more people are treated by it, so the number waiting for treatment at any given time will increase in absolute terms. What the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury fails to recognise is that whereas 195,185 people were waiting for more than a year in 1979, in 1996 the figure is 4,576. I must point out to the hon. Gentleman again that it is the length of time for which someone waits for an operation and treatment that counts.

Earlier, an Opposition Member who is not present now said, from a sedentary position, that we were cheating with our figures, because we were not including out-patient waiting times. But the Government pass that benchmark test as well, with flying colours: 85 per cent. of patients are now seen within 13 weeks at out-patient clinics, which is a great achievement.

Another thing that we did not hear about from the Opposition is their policy on GP fundholding, which changes regularly with every change in Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen. The language has changed—and I hope that the nation understands what that language means as well as GP fundholders do. First the Opposition were going to abolish fundholding; then they were going to replace it. Now, I understand that—following a speech made in Harrogate by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury to the Association of Fundholding Practices—we have heard something else: it is going to evolve.

It is no good for the hon. Gentleman to go to conferences of GP fundholders and praise them for their achievements, saying that he will listen to what is said about fundholding in the future, and then to come to the House and make a speech that denigrates those achievements in the clearest and most absolute way. Whatever words he and his hon. Friends use about GP fundholding, my goodness, we know what replacing it, evolving it or abolishing it actually means. If anyone who was a member of Stalin's Politburo was told that he would be evolved or replaced, he knew exactly what would happen—and that is precisely what GP fundholders understand.

Let me end not just by confirming the Government's commitment to the White Paper that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has rightly presented—indicating confirmation of our adherence to the principles of the NHS—but by talking about the primary care-led NHS. It is a tremendous achievement for GPs across the country, both fundholders and non-fundholders, that we are now in a position to proceed with a primary care-led Bill that will make a primary care-led NHS a reality.

I object to Opposition Members' denigration of what has been happening, both in innovation in primary care through fundholders and in other ways. A policy of denigration is a disgrace, because it betrays the work of all who perform services in the NHS.

I recently wrote to the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the Leader of the Opposition, raising with him an issue that he had raised at Prime Minister's Question Time. On that occasion, the right hon. Gentleman made yet another unfounded assertion about our NHS, saying that maternity services had declined under the present Government in recent years. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I note that that is given some support by the Labour party. I hope that the midwives who deliver maternity services, and all who have worked hard to develop changing childbirth techniques—

Ms Jowell: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Malone: Not now.

I hope that all those who have improved the quality of maternity services will understand how little the Leader of the Opposition values them.

I have issued a challenge to the Leader of the Opposition, and I issue it to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury as well. Those who criticise the NHS should put up or shut up. They should give us the facts and figures, so that we may respond. What is intolerable to all who work in

the service is the denigration of their achievements through unfounded accusations, which has been the tactic of the Labour party in recent years. It has had an opportunity today to explain to the House and to the electorate whether it has a vision for the future of the NHS. It has none. It is this party and this Government who have that vision and who will carry it forward in the next Parliament.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 268, Noes 274.

Division No. 16] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Austin–Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Ms R *(P'erth Kinross)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Miss Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Keen, Alan
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'ld)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Maginnis, Ken
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Sir James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Jane Kennedy and
Ms Angela Eagle.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Ian
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'd)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Stott, Roger
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'd)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bowen Wells and
Mr. Roger Knapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House believes the National Health Service is one of the success stories of modern Britain and is wholeheartedly committed to developing the NHS on the basis of its founding principles of universality, high quality and availability on the basis of clinical need, without regard for the patient's ability to pay; expresses its support for the Government's initiatives to release £300 million from unnecessary NHS administration; welcomes both the Government's further plans to develop NHS primary care and the recent White Paper A Service With Ambitions, which sets out a medium-term framework for a high-quality patient-focused NHS; and welcomes the Government's pledge to spend more money on the NHS, over and above inflation, for each year of the five years of the next Parliament.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

CINEMA AND TELEVISION PRODUCTION

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 12357/95 relating to the establishment of a European Guarantee Fund to promote cinema and television production; and supports the Government's view that such a fund can only be successful in strengthening the audiovisual industries if it is privately funded and run on wholly commercial lines.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

IDENTIFICATION OF CATTLE AND LABELLING OF BEEF AND BEEF PRODUCTS

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 10495/96, relating to the identification and registration of bovine animals, and the labelling of beef and beef products; and supports the principle of improved traceability for cattle as a means to improve consumer confidence in beef.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With permission, I shall put together the following two motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Succession (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 24th October, be approved.

That the draft Rates (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 24th October, be approved.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

DENTISTS

That the draft Dental Auxiliaries (Amendment) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 30th October, be approved.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Question agreed to.

Water Meters (Norwich)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

10.15 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I am very grateful for the opportunity to raise the subject of water metering in Norwich. I am pleased to welcome my hon. Friend the Minister, who is to reply to the debate. I was worried whether he would get to the Front Bench in time, but he is there and I welcome him and his colleagues.

This is an important subject, because East Anglia has the lowest average annual rainfall of any region in the United Kingdom, comparable to that of the southern coastline of the Mediterranean. I had the privilege of raising the implications for Norwich and Norfolk of that water scarcity in an Adjournment debate back in February 1992.

You may recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that at that time we had had a long period of drought and water depletion. I remember arguing strongly for the installation of water meters. That is the subject to which I am returning tonight. It was an important subject then, and it is more important now. The efficient use of water and water conservation measures matter more to us than to people in other parts of the country.

My concern is not specifically the provision of water meters to consumers in my constituency, but the decision of Norwich city council to deny the opportunity to its periodic or weekly tenants to have meters installed. The city council owns almost 20,000 homes in Norwich—more than one third of all homes in the area—so a large number of people are being denied the opportunity to cut their water bills. That is particularly true of elderly people, small families and individuals. When making its decision and ignoring the well-informed local campaign work of people such as Bashir Khanbai, John Fisher and Robert Kinghorn, the Labour majority on the council has shown itself to be out of date and seriously out of touch with the people of Norwich.

The ostensible reason for the policy appears to be that the installation of water meters would discriminate against those who may need to use large quantities of water—the disabled, those with long-term illnesses and people with large families. The council defends its position on the further ground that any advantage to existing tenants may prove a disadvantage to subsequent tenants of properties with water meters. It has been alleged that there are grave public health concerns over the issue. As a result, the city council has barred its tenants from taking advantage of the metering options offered by Anglian Water.

Other councils in Norfolk—such as South Norfolk district council and North Norfolk district council—with Broadland housing association and others, have no objections in principle to the installation of water meters in their properties. I understand that the Anglia housing association judges each application for the installation of water meters on its merits and supports the installation of meters in homes occupied by elderly tenants. The Wherry housing association in my constituency also agrees to the installation of meters when tenants request them. Single and elderly tenants welcome the opportunity to cut their bills by up to three quarters. Wherry housing association has had no complaints about water metering from its

[Mr. Patrick Thompson]

tenants. The tenant profiles of the associations must be broadly similar to that of Norwich city council—they certainly operate in comparable areas. If metering is acceptable to them and to their tenants, it should also be acceptable to the city council.

The logic of the city council's position is dubious and its motives must be open to the gravest suspicion. I do not believe that the council is in a position to judge who among its tenants will benefit from the installation of water meters. That is a decision that the tenants themselves are best fitted to take. The present system of basing water charges on the former domestic rating system means that bills in Norwich are high because rateable values were high.

Elderly people and single occupants have higher bills than they would with water meters. For example, a single person pays an average water bill of £294 a year in Anglian Water's region. That could be cut to between £89 and £179 with a water meter. Couples with or without children could save between £75 and £150 per year. Many pensioners and others among the city council's tenants find themselves subsidising other water consumers, including other council tenants, because they are forced to pay for their water on the basis of rateable value. I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that that cannot be right.

Pensioners and people who are disabled, or who have large families, or are suffering from illness, are precisely the people who are most likely to be living on a limited income and who are most keen to be able to judge whether they would benefit from careful use of water. Anglian Water has estimated that 70 per cent. of its customers could save at least 10 per cent. on their water bills by using meters, which typically save up to 15 per cent. of water usage.

Boreholes are already being sunk under Norwich to guarantee future water supplies. Without further water conservation measures, there might have to be a new reservoir—costing about £300 million. Why should council tenants be prevented from cutting their bills and saving water? No council can tell that all future tenants will be disadvantaged by having the opportunity to occupy premises with water meters. Norwich city council assumes that all future tenants will come from large families and will not want water meters. There is no guarantee of either.

If tenants think that they may benefit from installing water meters, they should be able to choose to have them. The issue in this debate is choice. They should be able to choose to have meters installed without town hall obstruction. The rights of tenants, therefore, must come first and not last in Norwich city council's thinking.

The attitude of the council is particularly worrying since our local water supplier, Anglian Water plc, has shown itself to be acutely aware of its social responsibilities. It has created a wide range of schemes to help customers meet their water bills. Large, low-income families have been targeted for that aid. Customers can pay by cash, through any post office or high street bank, by direct debit through bank accounts, by instalments paid at post offices or banks, with water savings stamps, which can be purchased at most post offices, through the Girobank or through the post. People on income support can apply for payments to be made direct from their benefits by the Department of Social Security. It is no accident that the Norfolk area has proved to be the second most enthusiastic of all those covered by Anglian Water for accepting water meters.

Moreover, Anglian Water recently announced that all domestic customers who pay for their water through the use of water meters will have their service pipes from the stop tap to the side of the house maintained free of charge as from 1 January 1997. At present, the owner of the property is responsible for the service pipe unless specific cover is in place. Norwich city council could save itself a good deal of money by encouraging its tenants to go on to water meters, thereby saving it the cost of repairing service pipes.

Anglian Water has also been conducting trials of special pre-payment methods, using smart cards in Milton Keynes and Wellingborough. The cards enable customers with large, accumulated debts to pay for their water and a small proportion of their arrears on a regular basis. I understand that they have proved extremely popular and that the potential exists for the extension of the technology to other parts of the East Anglia region.

I want to mention the creation of the water trust fund, which is administered by an independent board of trustees to help customers in serious arrears to make a fresh start. Anglian Water contributed £2 million to that fund earlier in the year, and the first grants have already been made, using the machinery of the citizens advice bureaux.

The Office of Water Services, the regulatory body for the water industry, believes that metering is the best and fairest long-term method of paying for water. Its view is that all customers should have the option of using water meters and that customers with high discretionary usage should certainly do so.

Ofwat has the support of its national consumer council for the position that council tenants should have the option of having water meters installed, giving them more control of their bills. The national consumer council believes that local authorities that deny their tenants that option are behaving unreasonably.

Despite what I said earlier about the case put by Norwich city council, no instance of a risk to health arising from the installation of water meters is known to Ofwat or to the water supply companies. It is clearly in the wider interest of efficient water usage that meters should be installed in new homes and in older ones where tenants desire them. That is one reason why Ofwat has opposed unduly high standing charges for domestic customers and has taken action to balance tariffs.

The cost of installing meters has been significantly reduced since 1994-95; 23 companies have reduced their charges, five have not changed them since 1994, and no company has increased its installation charges since 1995-96.

Does the 1991 water legislation require water companies to supply water meters if they are requested by tenants or occupants of residential property? If so, can Norwich city council be sued by its tenants for not allowing them to install meters? The Environment Act 1995 certainly places a duty on water companies to encourage the efficient use of water in their area of operation, a duty that Norwich city council has decided to prevent Anglian Water from fulfilling.

The sorry truth about water metering in Norwich is that the city council does not trust its tenants to make decisions in their own interests. They are not allowed to choose

between metering and the present system of payment, which is to the disadvantage of many groups, especially the elderly, because that would diminish the control that the council exercises over them.

To allow tenants to make savings on their water bills would compromise their dependent status. Properties with water meters might well prove more attractive than those without. Once the floodgates of metering had opened, the council might be compelled to widen choice for all its tenants. The record of old Labour and new in Norwich suggests that it may be time for the council's control over such a large proportion of the housing stock to be ended, and for modern social landlords, responsive to the needs of tenants, to take up the reins of management in the interests of the wider community.

10.27 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this matter, and I am sure that many of his constituents will be grateful to him for so forcefully expressing his concerns.

As my hon. Friend rightly says, he has a background of concern about conservation and water issues, and I am sure that he speaks for many individuals in Norwich, especially the tenants of Norwich city council, when he so clearly expresses his worries about the denial of choice by the council and its failure to take into account the needs of environmental good husbandry. As he rightly said, it is regrettable that tenants are being denied choice and that the needs of the environment are being ignored by the council.

We accept that the good husbandry of water resources is an important part of sustainable development. It is also part of the challenge of global warming, not least for an already dry area such as East Anglia, as my hon. Friend so clearly stated. The development of new sources of water supply may be necessary, but our first recourse should be to make the best use of existing supplies. Last month, the Government published a comprehensive examination of the problem, "Water Resources and Supply: Agenda for Action", with a number of action points for the Government, the regulators, the water companies and consumers.

I shall mention a few of the steps that are being taken. The Government, through the Office of Water Services, are pressing water companies to reduce leakage in their distribution system to an economic minimum. The Director General of Water Services has published each water company's long-term leakage target and the targets for the next financial year.

Reducing the use of water through demand management makes sense. Since 1 February, all water companies have had a new duty to promote the efficient use of water by their customers. Efficient use of water means using water-efficient equipment and cutting leakage in customers' pipes, as well as informing the public about the relationship between water use and supply. When all other measures that should be taken have been taken, the key to the efficient use of water must lie with the user. In that respect, my hon. Friend's concerns have great force.

Domestic demand has been growing over the years, with the widespread use of appliances such as automatic washing machines and the increased ownership of dishwashers. The popularity of gardening and the use of garden sprinklers also has a marked impact in summer. In one hour, a sprinkler can use enough water to supply a family of four for two days. We are not trying to discourage clean cars or green gardens, but there is a strong case for saying that customers should pay for them.

My hon. Friend argued eloquently for the merits of water metering as a means of conserving water resources and postponing or eliminating the need for new boreholes or reservoirs with all their environmental implications. I agree with his remarks. The encouragement of metering is a key element in the Government's water strategy. There is widespread resentment, especially in times of water shortage, that neighbours can be using vastly different quantities of water without any effect on their bills. Metering is fair: one pays only for what one uses. It is also successful.

Trials have shown an immediate reduction both in water use and in many customers' bills. Customers are being denied that opportunity by Norwich city council and water use is being affected adversely. I must make it clear that the Government do not control or impose the method of charging for water. That decision is for the water companies. The proviso is that they should operate within the rules set by statute and supervised by the Director General of Water Services.

On the method of charging, the law simply requires that companies should not set prices that are unduly discriminatory or preferential. The decision is up to water companies but, of course, the Government have a view on the charging method, which we have spelt out. We believe that the gradual extension of metering, together with the development of more sophisticated tariff structures, has an essential role to play in managing demand for water. In general, we believe that the introduction of water metering should be selective and that switching to metered charging should be voluntary for occupiers who are charged in their present properties on the basis of rateable values. However, new properties should be fitted with meters as the norm, as should those with high external use for garden watering and swimming pools. Where an occupier moves to a dwelling with a meter, charging should be metered.

I welcome the fact that companies are reducing the cost of their voluntary meter option schemes and that eight companies, including Anglian Water, offer free installation for customers who want meters. That is the Government's policy on metering, although it is for companies to make the choice of charging methods. This is the background to what is happening in Norwich.

Anglian Water is pressing ahead with the installation of water meters. I understand that it has adopted a programme of installing meters in all properties. That is a long undertaking, with a target of 40 per cent. coverage by 2000. Where it fits meters, it gives existing customers the choice of continuing on the old rateable value basis or switching to a metered bill, whichever customers choose as the lower for them. For normal domestic uses, it is only with new or substantially altered properties or where new customers enter properties that already have meters that the company requires metered payment. In those cases, the customer should know beforehand what he is taking on as part of the dwelling. Anglian also requires metered payment when the customer uses a garden sprinkler or has a swimming pool. Anglian will install meters for

[Mr. James Clappison]

customers on request. That offers many customers a quick route to immediate savings, as my hon. Friend's calculations showed.

I understand that Norwich city council has adopted a policy of root and branch opposition to water metering. It is apparently not interested in the environmental arguments for saving water or in giving its tenants the choice of whether to be metered. It should be noted that for many of the least well-off, especially single-person households and pensioners, metering would offer savings on their current water bills with no change in their water consumption habits. Meters offer every household greater control over water bills. The sensible use of water can go a long way to trim bills.

My hon. Friend asked about the legal position on the installation of meters, and wanted to know whether tenants have any recourse if the city council obstructs the installation of meters even when they have been requested. When Anglian Water or any other water company is carrying out a programme of meter installation, the company gives notice to customers and then has powers, like other statutory undertakers, to enter premises and fit meters even over the objections of the council or any other landlord.

In the long term, Norwich city council or any other council cannot prevent the steady progress of meter installation. Where, however, the company is fitting at the voluntary request of the tenant, the situation is different. In meeting the customer's request for a meter, Anglian Water is not invoking any powers of compulsion.

There is a duty on local authority tenants under the Housing Act 1985 not to carry out an improvement without the consent of the landlord, which may not be unreasonably withheld. The law treats adding a water meter as an improvement. If the local authority landlord refuses consent, the tenant may not make an unauthorised improvement. Where the tenant has asked for the meter, it is like the tenant calling the builders in. It is up to the tenant to ensure that he has the necessary consent.

If the water company is asked by a tenant to install a meter, it will assume that the customer has any necessary consent. It will continue installing on request. If a tenant has a meter installed without the consent of the landlord, that is in law a matter between the landlord and the tenant, not the water company.

If a tenant is refused consent, his recourse would not be to sue the landlord. The law provides that such consent may not be unreasonably withheld. That would be the issue. In the end, it would be for the courts to decide whether the council had been reasonable in withholding its consent.

I hope that the issue will not come before the courts. I hope also that Norwich city council will listen to the force of my hon. Friend's arguments and reconsider its policy on water metering. I understand that, even now, the eastern customers service committee of Ofwat, which represents the customers of Anglian Water, has written to the city council to ask it to support water metering.

Whatever policy the council adopts, the legal position is that it cannot prevent the progressive installation of meters under Anglian Water's rolling programme. The council can delay only by depriving individual tenants of the choice of voluntarily moving at once to lower metered bills.

Metering is the fair and sustainable way to charge for water use. I hope, as I have said, that the debate will be heard by the council, and that it will listen to the reasonable arguments that have been advanced by my hon. Friend. I hope also that it will consider the interests of its tenants, including those who wish to exercise there choice in this matter, and grant them that choice. In doing so, it will act in the interests of consumer choice and in the wider interests of the environment. Those are two forceful arguments in favour of the council acceding to the reasonable arguments that have been advanced by my hon. Friend.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-three minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 21 November 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Milk Quota

1. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning the level of the milk quota in the United Kingdom. [3719]

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Douglas Hogg): The Commission will present the Council with an options paper on the future of the dairy industry early next year. I shall continue to resist any arbitrary cuts in the United Kingdom's allocation.

Mr. Evans: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that answer and for visiting my constituency recently and talking directly to several farmers who have been hit by the bovine spongiform encephalopathy crisis. He heard the concerns of farmers in my constituency, especially Mr. Paul Kenny who has a farm in Slaidburn and who spoke about the milk quota problem. Our milk quota is not sufficient to meet the amount that we should produce for home consumption. That problem has been exacerbated by the BSE crisis because many cattle that would not normally be in the fields are being kept out and producing milk. I fear that we will hit our quota sooner rather than later, but may face a shortage of milk thanks to the quota problem. Can he reassure farmers in Ribble Valley that he is working hard to ensure that we get an increased milk quota and that he is doing all that he can to ameliorate the current crisis?

Mr. Hogg: I enjoyed my visit to my hon. Friend's constituency and I remember Mr. Kenny and the point that he made. In the long term, we would like the system of quotas to be done away with. In the short term, the position is more encouraging than some people have imagined in the sense that milk production is now 0.5 per cent. below the quota profile. That is an encouraging state of affairs.

Mr. Stevenson: Is not the reality that the Government failed the country in 1984 when they agreed to milk quotas way below our requirements? Is not the solution to that problem the abolition of milk quotas? Has the Minister discussed with the new members of the European Community—Sweden, Finland and Austria—their views of the future of milk quotas?

Mr. Hogg: There are several concepts of what we should have when the present system of milk quotas expires in 2000. The United Kingdom would much prefer to do away with quotas and price support of the present sort, although there would have to be a fairly extended transitional period. We must await the options paper, which we will get early next year. It is extraordinary that a Labour Member should make a point about a bad baseline, however, because we got less than we would have liked as a direct consequence of the agri-monetary policy pursued by the Labour party in the 1970s, which prevented us from having a sufficient output to justify a larger basic quota.

Mr. Garnier: May I take it that my right hon. and learned Friend is aware of the dilemma faced by dairy farmers in my constituency and elsewhere? With the uncertainty over the accelerated cull, they do not know whether to dry off their cows or continue to milk them throughout the winter and thus go over quota. That causes difficulties with forward planning. Will he take that into account in his discussions with his European counterparts?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. and learned Friend makes a sound point. It is highly desirable that dairy producers in his constituency should know the situation as exactly, and as soon, as possible.

Mrs. Golding: Is the Minister aware that milk quotas, with his deregulation policies, have pushed up prices, destroyed jobs and caused problems with doorstep delivery? Will he make more effort to encourage children to drink milk rather than make policies that store up health problems for later life, such as osteoporosis?

Mr. Hogg: I do not want to be unkind to the hon. Lady, but the first part of her question was total nonsense. The process of deregulation has actually been a great success.

BSE (Pet Food)

2. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he has taken to ensure that BSE-infected cattle are not used by pet food manufacturers. [3720]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Since 1988, all cattle suspected of having BSE must, by law, be notified to the Ministry; those affected are then slaughtered and the carcase incinerated.

Mr. Heppell: Does the Minister have any contingency plans if any cross-species infection is identified, so that we do not have the same sort of inept muddle that we have had with mad cow disease if we identify mad dog disease?

Mr. Hogg: That is not a well-directed question.

Mr. Stewart: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the industry has always been in the lead on safety matters? For example, the member companies of the Pet Food Manufacturers Association had a voluntary ban on the use of specified bovine offal six months before the House passed legislation on human use. Will he reassure the House that he will keep in the closest touch

with the industry at the highest level as well as at official level, so that the industry is fully apprised of European developments?

Mr. Hogg: Yes, indeed; but the controls that we have in abattoirs, rendering plants and knackeries are the toughest in Europe and address all the points about which my hon. Friend is concerned and which underpin his question.

Mr. Tyler: In connection with all the measures for the eradication of BSE to which the Minister has referred, does he accept that there is continuing concern about the mismanagement of the slaughter programme? Has he read the article in a recent edition of *Professional Engineering*, which refers to the fact that, although the welcome increase in the slaughter programme to around 55,000 a week is dramatic, only about 1,000 carcases are being safely disposed of? The report states—I hope that he will confirm this—that the Ministry is still "frantically searching" for a safe solution to that problem. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that there is still widespread concern at the Government's failure to take a grip on the cull?

Mr. Hogg: I really do not think that that criticism is especially well founded. On the over-30-month scheme, we now have the slaughter rate up to around 60,000—the total was slightly more than 60,000 last week—and, given that rate, I am confident that we can clear the backlog by the end of the year, as we said some time ago.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Which year?

Mr. Hogg: At the end of this year. That is an absurd intervention. The hon. Gentleman is simply causing confusion.

Set-aside (Bird Life)

3. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to protect bird life on set–aside land. [3722]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Tony Baldry): The management rules for set-aside are designed to protect wildlife and the environment. Further changes are being introduced in 1997 to restrict the cutting, and prohibit the cultivation, of set-aside during the main nesting season to protect birds such as lapwing and skylark.

Mr. Spring: I welcome the new changes in the management of set-aside as it affects bird life. Does my hon. Friend agree that the issue of bird life is one of considerable interest to those of us who are lucky enough to live in rural areas? Is he aware, for example, that the rare stone curlew comes to nest at Elveden in my constituency, and that the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, with lottery funding, is recreating the natural habitat of the fens at Lakenheath as it existed prior to the draining of the fens several hundred years ago?

Mr. Baldry: The Government and landowners do an enormous amount, both on set-aside and non-set-aside land, to promote bird life. We have environmentally sensitive areas and the countryside stewardship scheme, and landowners co-operate with the farming and wildlife advisory group. Those are excellent initiatives. Indeed, encouraged by the RSPB, they are all worthwhile initiatives to promote bird life.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: The Minister mentioned the agri-environment regulations, but can I direct his attention to the organic aid scheme? Birds thrive in an organic environment and, although I applaud the Government's action on the organic aid scheme, why is no help given to farmers who already farm organically? Is not that a change that should be made?

Mr. Baldry: Farmers who farm organically will find increasingly that they will be rewarded in the marketplace. They should not require reward from the Government. If they believe that there is a demand for organic farming, that reward will come to them in the marketplace subsequently.

Intervention Buying

4. **Mr. Trickett:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of expenditure on the intervention buying of agricultural commodities in the United Kingdom in 1996–97. [3723]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Estimated expenditure on the intervention buying of agricultural commodities in the United Kingdom in 1996-97 is £320 million.

Mr. Trickett: Can the Minister confirm that 413,000 tonnes of beef now stands in a mountain in intervention? Does he accept that that is a clear measure of the Government's failure to deal with the BSE crisis adequately? Does he accept that the only way to restore consumer confidence is to establish an absolutely independent, customer-oriented food standards agency, which might help to restore consumer confidence?

Mr. Hogg: In the financial year 1996-97, purchases of beef are expected to amount to about 100,000 tonnes. We have had to intervene in the market as a consequence of the collapse in consumer confidence that has occurred as a result of what is commonly referred to as the BSE crisis. It is a consequence of the lack of market confidence.

Mr. Salmond: Intervention buying is an important way to stabilise agricultural markets, so what action are the Government taking to stabilise the European market in farmed salmon? Is the Chancellor of the Exchequer blocking progress to stabilise that market? Could it be that an industry that contributes 6,000 jobs and £250 million to the Scottish economy is not important enough to deserve effective action from the Government?

Mr. Hogg: That is a question of such complexity that I propose to respond to the hon. Gentleman in writing.

Dr. Strang: Does the Minister agree that his vacillation over the Florence agreement is undermining efforts to restore beef markets throughout Europe? The right hon. and learned Gentleman makes great play of the fact that the UK has met four of the five Florence obligations, but does he realise that three of those four conditions relate to human and animal health and should have been met

years ago, and that the chaos in the Government's over-30-month slaughter scheme led to the fourth condition—that the Government get their act together? Regarding the fifth condition, for which, apparently, the Minister has not yet presented proposals, will he tell the House today whether he will implement a selective slaughter programme—yes or no?

Mr. Hogg: The premise that underpins the hon. Gentleman's question is the lack of confidence in European markets. There is indeed a lack of confidence in European markets. There has been a collapse in the sale price of beef in European markets, and there is much anxiety among the farming community. That has certainly had an effect on members of the European Union, making them less willing or able—two ways of describing the same thing—than they previously were to proceed rapidly and substantially to lift the ban.

An accelerated cull has absolutely nothing to do with human safety and is not justified on those terms.

Set-aside (Charity Events)

5. **Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress he has made in respect of changing the EU rules which prohibit charity events on set–aside land. [3724]

Mr. Baldry: I am pleased to be able to say that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister secured an undertaking from the European Commission in July that the use of set-aside land for charitable events would be permitted in future. The Government welcome that as a sensible change to the set-aside rules which meets public concerns.

Sir Irvine Patnick: Is my hon. Friend aware that the prohibition is one more reason why the public in the United Kingdom are beginning to dislike the European Union? This is nonsenseland. Can my hon. Friend assure me that he will progress the revision of the common agricultural policy as soon as possible?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the type of approach that the Commission took at the end of 1995, when it wrote to us ruling out the use of set-aside land for charitable and local fund-raising events, brings the Commission into disrepute; that is why we sought to persuade the Commission to relax the rules for such events. We were successful, and whenever necessary we seek to ensure that the Community proceeds on the basis of commonsense policies.

Mr. Morley: I have been listening carefully to the Minister's reply, but the House has not yet heard the whole story. As I understand it from the Commission, the Government did indeed approach the Commission for clarification, but concentrated in their interpretation on the issue of the lucrative use of set-aside land—including for charitable purposes. The Commission maintains that the Government's own interpretation is what stopped the charitable use of set-aside land for at least a year before the issue was clarified. The rules most certainly have not been changed—the Minister did not say that they have—but they have been clarified.

The problem is that the Ministry often interprets European Union rules to suit itself—and sometimes wrongly—and then blames the EU, when the blame should rest with MAFF itself.

Mr. Baldry: That is complete hogwash. The simple facts are as follows: at the end of 1995, the Commission wrote to us ruling out the use of set-aside land for charitable and local fund-raising events, and made it perfectly clear that it was tightening up on the rules. The initiative came from the Commission, not from us—

Mr. Morley: Not on the interpretation of lucrative use.

Mr. Baldry: I know that it is difficult for anyone in the Labour party to understand the idea of "lucrative". When charities organise fund-raising events, they hope to raise money from them. Such activities are, therefore, lucrative. The Commission made it very clear that it was tightening up the rules. We had to take the initiative to get the Commission to change those rules back, and that is what we have done.

Meat Retailing Sector

6. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will establish an independent inquiry into the pricing practices of the meat retailing sector. [3725]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Angela Browning): We do not see the need to hold an inquiry into the meat retailing sector at the moment.

Mr. Sheerman: Is the Minister aware that beef farmers in this country, who get no help in the present difficult circumstances—

Mrs. Browning *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Sheerman: Most beef farmers raise their beef and take their cattle to market, where they get 20 per cent. less for them than they did before March. That has made it not worth feeding the animals over a long period. They want to know—it has not yet been explained to them properly—why a 20 per cent. cut in the price they get at market works through to a reduction of only 1 per cent. in the price to the consumer and housewife—and butchers and supermarkets. Those facts have been checked with the Minister and with the House of Commons Library. Farmers and consumers are not satisfied that they are not being robbed by someone along the food chain.

Mrs. Browning: It is quite fallacious to say that the Ministry has not supported the beef farmer. We have done so with two tranches of money—£29 million already distributed at more than £60 per head of cattle that have gone into the food chain; and another tranche of £29 million due to be paid shortly to support farmers—

Mr. Sheerman *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Browning: It is no good the hon. Gentleman shaking his head: it is a matter of record. The hon. Gentleman may not like the truth, but here it is. I do not know how often he does his shopping: I hope that he, like me, goes to the supermarket and the butcher every week. If he does, he cannot fail to have noticed that, since 20 March—[HON. MEMBERS: "Get on with it."] I am getting on with it. It is pathetic that when this important market and the issue of consumer confidence in this product are discussed in the House, Opposition boys and girls are so quick to run down this vital industry. *[Interruption.]* The supermarkets have supported British beef; they said from day one that they would sell it, and they have. I offer the hon. Gentleman one example— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has a right to answer without being barracked.

Mrs. Browning: Let me give the hon. Gentleman one fact—there are many more. In November 1995, Tesco was selling British mince at 139p per kilogram. This week, mince is on sale in Tesco, as it is in many other supermarkets, at 94p per kilogram. Such a display of confidence will get people back to British meat. That is what the supermarkets are doing.

Sir Donald Thompson: That was telling them —I thank my hon. Friend. I do not believe that she has had any inquiry from butchers for financial support, however deserving they may be. Does she agree that the high street butcher can tell the customer exactly where the meat comes from, how to cook it and what price to pay for it?

Mrs. Browning: Indeed. My hon. Friend mentions an important sector of the meat retailing trade. The independent butchery trade is responsible for the retailing of 40 per cent. of British meat. We have been supportive of, for example, campaigns run by the Meat and Livestock Commission, especially to promote important sales of forequarter cuts such as braising beef and mince. I was pleased to launch the 8,000th independent butcher selling MLC-accredited mince. It has been an extremely successful campaign and it has done a great deal to restore British confidence.

Mr. Davidson: Does the Minister accept that there is a relationship between the amount of beef consumed and the price? Does she agree that one way to clear the stocks of intervention beef quickly is to give it away to charitable organisations so that they can distribute it to the needy in areas such as mine? Will she extend that scheme beyond beef to butter and, if she wishes to be popular, to wine and cheese?

Mrs. Browning: I can inform the House that 64,000 tonnes of intervention beef has been stewed and canned and is being distributed as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

EC Fruit and Vegetable Regime

7. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the reform of the EC fruit and vegetable regime. [3726]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Mr. Tim Boswell): Now that the Council regulation has been agreed, we are working with our growers to ensure that the detailed implementing rules reflect their needs.

Mr. Lidington: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the reforms that he and his European colleagues have secured to the fruit and vegetable regime. Will he confirm that only through a thorough overhaul of the common agricultural policy will it be possible to eliminate the waste and corruption that is still endemic in the present system of subsidies? Will he also strive for the repatriation of some elements of agricultural policy to Britain so that, for example, the minimum size of fruit that can be sold in our shops can once again be a matter for the consumer, not for politicians or bureaucrats?

Mr. Boswell: I agree with much of what my hon. Friend says. Credit for negotiating the fruit and vegetable regime should go to our right hon. and learned Friend. My hon. Friend is right to say that our view of the common agricultural policy does not stop at the limited review and reform of the fruit and vegetable regime. We want a much more market-related and competitive CAP. There have been regulations on fruit sizes in the United Kingdom for many years—predating the CAP. No significant changes are being enacted under the CAP or the fruit and vegetable regime, save in respect of one or two of the minimum sizes of traditionally larger apples. I have read some press comment, not all of which is well conceived, but my hon. Friend can rest assured that the Cox's Orange Pippin, and the small Cox's Orange Pippin, are safe in our hands.

Mr. Home Robertson: Why are the Government going to such lengths to turn Europe into a continent of vegetarians? Since the Prime Minister told the House four months ago that the beef export market could be reopened if the British Government fulfilled the Florence criteria and carried out the selective cull of cattle at risk from BSE, why is the Ministry refusing even to undertake preliminary work to identify the cattle that would need to be culled in order to fulfil those criteria?

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. and learned Friend has already responded fully and sufficiently to the issue of the selective cull. The initiative for depriving continental colleagues of the opportunity to eat British beef came at their behest, not ours. We regard the ban on selling excellent British beef in Europe as misconceived and legally inappropriate. We shall press at all times for its removal.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: Can my hon. Friend inform the House whether any progress has been made in Brussels on establishing a potato regime?

Mr. Boswell: We support the introduction of a modest potato regime along the lines of the fruit and vegetable regime, but with no recourse to intervention. It should protect and expand the market, but not involve waste or expense. We adhere fairly closely to the Commission position and we are pleased that several member states came into line with that position at the recent Council meeting. However, we have by no means secured the consensus that will lead to a common regime—although that remains a highly desirable objective.

Intensive Farming (Disincentives)

8. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to introduce disincentives in respect of intensive farming. [3727]

Mr. Boswell: The Department's codes of good agricultural practice provide guidance to all farmers on protecting the environment. Environmental incentives are available through our agri-environment schemes, which in many cases promote extensive farming. In addition, extensification premiums are paid under the suckler cow and beef special premium schemes.

Mr. Flynn: Does the Minister recall that one of the principal mistakes of over-intensive agriculture emerged in the realisation in 1988 that ruminant protein was almost certainly the main cause of BSE and that it was banned from cattle food? Is it not unbelievable that the Government confessed only recently that the date on which we can be certain that BSE contaminants were no longer in animal feed was 1 August—not 1988 but 1996? Will the Government apologise to the nation for their criminal delay, which has escalated the BSE tragedy?

Mr. Boswell: I sometimes think that the hon. Gentleman should award himself the prize for the worst link between a supplementary and a main question. His original question referred to the extensification of agricultural production. If the hon. Gentleman looks at virtually any textbook from 100 years ago on what ruminants may be fed, he will find meat meal mentioned.

The hon. Gentleman knows that the issues have been rehearsed very well and that the Government have consistently followed the scientific advice that they received in implementing the ban on ruminant protein. He knows also that the ban and the measures taken in 1989 and 1990 have resulted in a progressive elimination of BSE in this country. An independent study has shown that the epidemic will end by about 2001. Recent measures reinforce, rather than lessen, the impact of the original measures that were taken appropriately in light of knowledge at that time.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Does my hon. Friend agree that the best incentive for our farming community to extensify production is for the United Kingdom consumer to pay a fair price for a good product?

Mr. Boswell: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. British beef is excellent, it is well produced and it deserves to be consumed.

BSE (Isle of Wight)

9. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that cattle from the Isle of Wight are allocated a regular slot in an abattoir under the BSE slaughter programme. [3728]

Mr. Baldry: I expect abattoirs at Bath, Bridport and Langport, which have regularly taken over-30-month cattle from the Isle of Wight, to continue to do so.

Mr. Field: I thank my hon. Friend and his staff for the help that they have given the island farmers, but there is a problem with very short notice—often late on a Friday—of an allocated slot at 8 am on a Monday. Owing to problems with ferry bookings, that creates difficulties—of which I know my hon. Friend is aware. We need a regular weekly slot for about 25 head of cattle; we could then deal with the balance in the usual manner. I hope that my hon. Friend will use his considerable ministerial influence to assist me in obtaining that concession from the Intervention Board.

Mr. Baldry: I note my hon. Friend's specific point about the logistics of transporting cattle from the Isle of Wight. When we introduced the registration scheme, 438 cattle were registered as part of the backlog on the island. Of those, at least 170 have been slaughtered. I expect the remaining 260 or so to be slaughtered in the next two or three weeks. It is therefore a short-term problem and, when the OTMS continues, I do not expect any difficulties in ensuring that island farmers get a weekly slot as and when they need it.

Quarantine Regulations

10. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to vary current quarantine regulations. [3729]

Mrs. Browning: We are looking again at rabies control policy, taking account of the most recent information. If new moves are decided on, an announcement will be made. I stress that our paramount need is to protect the health of people and animals in this country.

Mr. Banks: Is the Minister aware that the great weight of public opinion and, increasingly, scientific opinion, is moving against the absurd rabies and quarantine regulations in this country? There has been no recorded outbreak of rabies coming from a pet animal anywhere in Europe, ever, yet thousands of animals and pets die in quarantine each year because of all the diseases that they pick up while there from other animals, and the appalling conditions that prevail in many quarantine kennels. Is it true, as was reported in *The Sunday Telegraph*, that the Prime Minister has asked the Minister to produce a report on the regulations by the end of this month? Is that true, and will he have that report?

Mrs. Browning: I certainly will not comment on reports in the newspapers that are a private matter between the Prime Minister and a Minister. I have made it clear to the House—I shall repeat it for the hon. Gentleman if he did not hear me the first time—that we are looking again at rabies control policy, taking account of the most recent information, which will, of course, include recent scientific information.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: My hon. Friend will be aware that her Department has spent considerable sums over the past few years—or rather more than the past few years—in promoting a fear of rabies in the British population. Will she now consider spending a similar sum in bringing up to date the scientific advice, on not only the veterinary side but the health side, so that the British public can view the matter in a rather different light from mediaeval witchcraft?

Mrs. Browning: My hon. Friend was Chairman of the Agriculture Select Committee, which produced a very

useful document, and we promised to keep the policy under review. I assure him, as I have the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), that all the latest scientific evidence on this subject—some of it is quite recent—will be taken into account as part of the review.

Mr. Pickthall: Has the Minister read the report by the Agriculture Select Committee? If so, she will have noticed that the previous Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food ruled out any change in quarantine regulations before the Select Committee had made its recommendations and reached a conclusion. Is it not time that the Ministry revisited that report? Will she bear it in mind that many of us on that Committee approached the study convinced that quarantine had to remain, but we were convinced of the opposite after we had examined all the evidence?

Mrs. Browning: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will remember that the Select Committee report generated quite a long debate on the Floor of the House in which he and I took part. I can assure him that we shall study the report as part of the review.

Mr. Key: I warmly welcome the cautious but determined way in which the Government are reconsidering this issue. Does my hon. Friend agree that nobody—including me—who advocates change to our quarantine rules is advocating relaxing or slackening the rules? It is quite the reverse. We wish to see a tightening of the regulations, using the latest scientific and technological equipment to eradicate the need for smuggling, which is probably the greatest threat.

Mrs. Browning: I am familiar with my hon. Friend's views. He has made them available to the Ministry on more than one occasion. We hear quite a few reports of smuggling, but the fact that a few people break a rule is not necessarily a reason to abolish that rule.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will the Minister bear it in mind that anyone who is concerned about human beings does not want a single person in the United Kingdom to die from rabies? The decisions that she takes will have an immediate and important effect, and I know that she will bear that in mind.

Mrs. Browning: I am conscious of the very important point that the hon. Lady mentioned. Indeed, I would go further and say that any proposal that is to be seriously considered must also take into account the fact that, in countries on mainland Europe that have been free of rabies for many years, people bitten or scratched by an animal still must have preventive treatment. For example, 10,000 people in France had to undergo injections as a result of being scratched or bitten by a dog. In the UK, that is not a treatment that people have to endure.

Fishing Industry

11. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of (a) compulsory decommissioning of fishing vessels and (b) quota hopping. [3730]

Mr. Baldry: The Government have made it clear that they are determined to find a lasting solution to the problem of quota hoppers. We have tabled a proposal in the intergovernmental conference. We have made it clear that we will not accept any compulsory decommissioning objectives for United Kingdom fishermen while the quota hopper issue remains unresolved.

Mr. Waterson: When I am next in the fishermen's club in Eastbourne, may I give my constituents the Minister's assurance that we will not accept up to a further 40 per cent. reduction in our fishing fleet, that we will not allow 20 per cent. of our fleet to remain in foreign ownership and that, for the British Government, nothing less than a treaty change will do?

Mr. Baldry: Yes. Fishing is one of the only policy areas in the European Union that applies national quotas. It is a perfectly straightforward proposition that UK fish should be for UK fishermen.

Mr. Trimble: I welcome the Minister's robust stand on quota hopping. Will he be just as robust on the unrealistic proposals for reductions in quotas that are coming from Brussels, which fly in the face of reality—particularly in the Irish sea? Brussels is trying to impose on fishermen regulations on the size of catch that do not take account of the species that inhabit those waters.

Mr. Baldry: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the UK fishing industry, of which the Northern Ireland industry is an important part, made sensible proposals on technical conservation, which were all but ignored by the Commission. The Commission produced some complex and disadvantageous proposals, which, I am glad to say, we were able to kick into touch and will not be debated at tomorrow's Fisheries Council meeting. The Commission has been told to go back and get its tackle in order before coming forward with further proposals on technical conservation.

Mr. Harris: Does my hon. Friend accept that developments on quota hopping and boats in foreign ownership become more bizarre each day? Has he seen today's *Daily Mail*, which contains an account of a sea rescue involving a Nimrod and two helicopters from my constituency that lifted a Spanish fisherman to Cornwall? It seems that the man was not ill after all. That is apparently only one of a number of such incidents. Has my hon. Friend got to the bottom of the mystery of the Spanish fishermen who turn up in benefit offices in Cornwall and register for national insurance numbers? What on earth is going on?

Mr. Baldry: There can be no justification for large numbers of Spanish-skippered, Spanish-owned, Spanish-crewed vessels in south-western waters masquerading as UK vessels and seeking to catch fish from our quota. That is crazy and it must come to an end. We are determined that it should end as speedily as possible. The only reasonable inference I can draw from the fact that Spaniards land from quota hoppers and take taxis to local unemployment benefit offices in my hon. Friend's constituency is that in some bizarre way they are

seeking to justify an economic link. It is the craziest of all economic links if the only link that they can justify is that of claiming unemployment benefit.

Dr. Godman: Does the Minister agree that vessels engaged in industrial fishing should be compulsorily decommissioned as soon as possible? He cannot deny that industrial fishing vessels have inflicted damage on commercially valuable stocks. When will the Council of Ministers ban industrial fishing?

Mr. Baldry: Quite apart from my concern that we should tackle the problem of quota hopping, I am worried about the Commission's proposals on decommissioning, because they make hardly any reference to industrial fishing. It is daft that proposals that are intended to deal with conservation measures do not deal with industrial fishing. If we are to reduce fish mortality, we must tackle the effects of industrial fishing, particularly on some of our stocks in the North sea.

12. **Mr. Legg:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money has been spent on decommissioning fishing vessels over the last three years. [3731]

Mr. Baldry: This year's scheme is still in progress, but it should add about £12 million to the £26.2 million spent in the previous three years.

Mr. Legg: Does my hon. Friend agree that this seems to be a cynical attempt to scupper our fishing fleet? Does he agree that the problem seems to be not too many boats chasing too few fish, but too many Spanish boats chasing our fish? May I urge him to take a leaf out of Sir Francis Drake's book when it comes to dealing with armadas, and to press the issue at the intergovernmental conference until it is settled to the satisfaction of our fishermen?

Mr. Baldry: I could not have made it plainer to the House that we are not prepared—the United Kingdom fishing industry is not prepared, and I do not think that any sensible person is prepared—to accept any compulsory further reductions in the UK fishing fleet until the whole issue of quota hoppers is resolved. Some 20 per cent. of our beam trawler fleet is now, in effect, foreign owned. The situation is crazy; it must be stopped, and we are determined that it will be.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 21 November. [3749]

The Prime Minister(Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mrs. Peacock: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the report in today's issue of *The Independent* which states that, yesterday, three members of the IRA's Army council were brought to the House of Commons by Labour Members? Is he aware that one of them was allowed to wander around for 20 minutes unaccompanied? Will he please instigate an immediate investigation?

The Prime Minister: I understand that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has written to Madam Speaker about the incident. My understanding is that those representatives of Sinn Fein were invited to the House to meet a number of hon. Members, that no prior notification about the meeting was given and that the representatives were, from time to time, left unattended. I do not know what the outcome of the inquiry will be, but I think that it is stunning naivety on the part of any hon. Member not to realise the connection between Sinn Fein and the IRA.

Mr. Blair: In view of the extraordinary importance of the European reports on a single currency—matters that may be decided by Ministers in December—does the Prime Minister not agree, on reflection, that it would be monstrous to deny hon. Members a chance to debate the reports in full on the Floor of the House, especially as that was the unanimous view of the Select Committee on European Legislation? Does he not agree that a general debate on European matters prior to the Dublin summit is no adequate substitute?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman is right about the last point. There was detailed scrutiny in the Standing Committee, and in due course we shall table the appropriate motion. No final decisions are made at the meeting of Finance Ministers; that will be a matter, if appropriate, for the European summit in Dublin. As the right hon. Gentleman well knows, and as my right hon. Friend the Lord President has made clear, the House invariably has an opportunity to have a full debate before such a summit, and there will be a full debate—in which this matter will be relevant—before the Dublin European summit.

Mr. Blair: Those explanations were specifically and unanimously rejected by the Select Committee. May I point out that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has actually written that decisions may be made over the next few weeks? In any event, surely we would be failing in our duty if we did not debate these matters properly in the House. Would the Prime Minister not be a good deal more honest if he simply stood at the Dispatch Box and said that he was afraid to let the Chancellor of the Exchequer stand and debate the issues? That speaks volumes about the disarray of his Government.

The Prime Minister: Anyone who thinks that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor is not willing, able and confident to debate with the right hon. Gentleman, or anyone, on any subject at any time simply does not know my right hon. and learned Friend. I repeat the point that I made to the right hon. Gentleman a moment ago: no decisions will be made at the Economic and Finance Council meeting. The matter will come forward to the Heads of Government meeting in Dublin. If decisions are to be taken, they will be taken there, and not even that is certain. In any event, this issue and other issues will be the subject of a full debate before Dublin.

Mr. Blair: What the right hon. Gentleman is saying is in contradiction to the letter from the Chancellor to the

Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation, but if the Chancellor is indeed happy and prepared to debate these issues, let us have the debate. There can be no possible reason for not debating these questions. How can the Prime Minister be trusted with Britain's future in Europe when the internal party management of the Conservative party—because that is what it is about—always takes precedence over the interests of Britain or even, as here, British democracy? If he is not afraid of the debate, let him call one.

The Prime Minister: This is the right hon. Gentleman who once wanted to leave the European Union. This is the right hon. Gentleman who said, "I will never be isolated in Europe." If he is never prepared to be isolated in Europe, he could not possibly defend the British interest in Europe. We are prepared to be isolated where necessary. We do defend the British interest. It will be debated in the House and I will defend the British interest at Dublin.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yesterday in European Standing Committee B, which I attended, there was no proper scrutiny of these important regulations, which affect the powers of the House. We were discussing the so-called stability pact, whereby important decisions about the British economy would be transferred from Britain to Frankfurt and Brussels. As my right hon. Friend himself has not made up his mind about whether Britain should join the single European currency, why should the House agree now to these regulations?

The Prime Minister: These regulations, were they to be approved in due course, would apply only to those countries that enter into a single currency—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes. It is no good saying, " No." That is the fact of the matter. Whether Britain enters a single currency will certainly be determined in the House and it would then be determined in a full referendum of this country.

Mr. Ashdown: The Prime Minister is simply running away on this issue and the whole country knows it.

The Audit Commission said today that we are now less effective on tackling youth crime than we were 10 years ago, that, of the 7 million youth crimes committed in Britain every year, only about one in 10 reach court and that the Government's programmes are ineffective, inefficient and wasteful. Given the fact that the Government have been in power for 17 years, whom do they blame for that?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman would do well to read the Audit Commission report in full. He will find that it endorses our strategy for intervening early with young people who might offend. I look forward to his support for the Green Paper, which he knows is coming forward. I hope that he will consider it. I hope that he will support it and I hope that he will, for once, have some proactive and worthwhile ideas to contribute to the debate.

Dame Jill Knight: Since today's press shows that Labour's answer to the question, "When is a pledge not a pledge?" is "When it is a commitment," will my right hon. Friend assure the House—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady will be heard. I want to hear her question. She is usually in order and I bet that she is going to be in order now.

Dame Jill Knight: Will my right hon. Friend give the House and its Members the pledge that he will continue to speak clearly and without ambiguity as to his plans for this country?

The Prime Minister: I find it extraordinary that 89 spending promises suddenly disappear, apparently overnight. The Opposition claim that what we said yesterday was untrue—I think "lies" was the word that they used—but, as we were quoting what they said, I wonder who the deceivers really were.

Q2. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 21 November. [3750]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Banks: Does the Prime Minister recall his promise—indeed, his pledge—to construct a classless society in this country? If he really meant that, why is he so set against the proposal from my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition to scrap the right of hereditary dukes, marquesses, earls, viscounts and lords to speak and vote in the House of Lords? Could it just be that the boy from Brixton, whom I remember, has got a feeling to make himself into a nob after he leaves here? Does he really want to be remembered as the nob from Brixton?

The Prime Minister: I hope that the future Lord Banks will reconsider what he has said about that matter. My remarks about a classless society were about equality of opportunity, and not about the grey uniformity that the hon. Gentleman would wish to see in this country.

Q3. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 21 November. [3751]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Lidington: May I ask my right hon. Friend to order an urgent Government study into the recent report from Goldman Sachs which suggested that every household in Aylesbury would pay an additional £70 a year for its electricity alone if a windfall tax on the utilities were introduced? Those households would also face higher charges for gas and water and for the use of the telephone. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that such

a tax would hit hardest at pensioners and people on low incomes—all those whom the Labour party pretends that it cares about?

The Prime Minister: It may be that we will find, yet again, that the windfall tax is another promise that is not. Perhaps we will find that out this afternoon.

What we do not know about the windfall tax is substantially more than what we know about it. We do not know who will pay it; what rate it would be levied at; and whom it would impact upon. We do not know why some utility chairmen think that they would not have to pay it. We do not know how much it would provide for the promises, mounting up to £30 billion, that the Labour party has made. I hope that we will get some of those answers this afternoon, but I doubt it.

Q4. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 21 November. [3752]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. McAllion: Although I regret the Prime Minister's decision to duck a debate on the single currency, I warmly welcome his courageous decision to sponsor this afternoon's debate on the privatised utilities and the Tory party's links with the bosses of those companies that have made obscene profits on the backs of the rest of us. Can he confirm that many of those companies have made large donations to the Tory party and have provided top jobs for ex-Tory Ministers? This afternoon's debate will allow the House to expose the Tories for what they really are—the political wing of the privatised utilities.

The Prime Minister: I thought for a moment that the hon. Gentleman was going to raise the question of the Leader of the Opposition's secret fund. I wonder whether we will hear which business men fund it; we certainly have not heard that yet. We were told by the Opposition spokesman that the fund has been set up as a blind trust to ensure that there is no linkage between donations and political influence. There were no names given, and nothing about the openness that the Opposition promised us some time ago. Because of a newspaper examination, all we have is the fact that the fund exists, and I hear that the deputy Leader of the Opposition has a research fund as well.

One minute, the Opposition attack share options; the next, they accept money from the millionaires who benefited from them. They attack successful business men and then host fund-raising dinners for those successful business men. They then call for openness in funding, but have a secret fund themselves. I wonder what the parliamentary word is for that behaviour.

Q5. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 21 November. [3753]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Marshall: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Barnet council recently voted to have its refuse collection done by the direct labour department despite the fact that an outside tender would have saved £500,000 over the length of the contract? Does he agree that that shows that Labour and Liberal councillors are more interested in jobs for the boys than in value for money for the ratepayers? Will my right hon. Friend assure me that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will take action to see that Barnet ratepayers are protected against dogmatic socialist policy?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will have heard what my hon. Friend had to say. It is no secret that the Labour party is hostile to competitive tendering, even though it saves money for the council tax payer—a fact which is an irrelevance to Labour. As the deputy leader of the Labour party once said,

"Society should tolerate relative inefficiency in labour intensive sectors".

In other words: jobs for the boys, not savings for the council tax payer.

Q6. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 21 November. [3754]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hain: How much will the Prime Minister's proposal to abolish capital gains tax and inheritance tax cost the average taxpayer? Will he tell us whether that is a pledge, a policy, an aim, an aspiration—or merely another Tory tax lie?

The Prime Minister: As I have frequently told the House, we are pledged to abolish, as affordable, capital gains tax. I shall tell the hon. Gentleman why. Such action will create jobs and stimulate employment, which is what I am determined to achieve in this country. The hon. Gentleman might like to create unemployment with extra social costs, but I wish to price people back into jobs by generating investment.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House for details of future business?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 25 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill.

Consideration of supplemental allocation of time motion relating to the Firearms (Amendment) Bill.

TUESDAY 26 NOVEMBER—My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will open his Budget statement.

WEDNESDAY 27 NOVEMBER—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Continuation of the Budget debate.

THURSDAY 28 NOVEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate.

FRIDAY 29 NOVEMBER—Debate on tourism on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 27 November there will be a debate on water for human consumption in European Standing Committee A, and a debate on the former Yugoslavia in European Standing Committee B. Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

The business for the following week will be as follows:

MONDAY 2 DECEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate.

TUESDAY 3 DECEMBER—Conclusion of the debate on the Budget statement.

WEDNESDAY 4 DECEMBER—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Government business will be taken.

THURSDAY 5 DECEMBER—Government business will be taken.

FRIDAY 6 DECEMBER—Debate on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The House will also wish to know that it will be proposed that on Wednesday 4 December there will be a debate on air carrier liability in European Standing Committee A, and a debate on protection against third country legislation in European Standing Committee B. Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

I should also tell the House that I have in mind two changes to the arrangement of statements during the Budget debate, which I hope that the House will think are sensible. The English local government finance statement will now be made on the second day—Wednesday 27 November—which will give local authorities a little more time to take their budget decisions. The social security statement, which hitherto has taken place on that day, will be replaced by a social security debate on the third day—Thursday 28 November—thus giving the House a proper opportunity to debate the social security aspects of the unified Budget settlement.

[*Wednesday 27 November:*

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community Document: 7208/95, Water for Human Consumption. Relevant European Legislation Committee Reports: HC 70-xxii (1994-95), HC 51-v, HC51-xxii and HC 51-xxix (1995-96).

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community Documents: (i) 7312/96, Former Yugoslavia: Aid for Reconstruction and Rehabilitation; (ii) 10602/96, Future Contractual Relations with Certain Countries in South Eastern Europe. Relevant European Legislation Committee Reports: (i) HC 51-xxiii, HC 51-xxvi and HC 51-xxix (1995-96); (ii) HC 36-ii (1996-97).

Wednesday 4 December:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community Document: 5231/96, Air Carrier Liability. Relevant European Legislation Committee Report: HC 36-ii (1996-97).

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community Document: 9573/96, Protection against Third Country Legislation. Relevant European Legislation Committee Report: HC 51-xxix (1995-96).]

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for that information. Will he ensure, following the statement in answer to the private notice question on the channel tunnel on Tuesday, that the matters that were mentioned will be followed up? Will he also ensure that there will be an opportunity for the House to debate the issue of channel tunnel safety? I am sure that he agrees that that is an important issue. We must not be alarmist, but it is important that the House should be kept informed. When the results of the public inquiries are announced, the House should have an opportunity to debate that important subject.

Secondly, will the Leader of the House arrange a debate in the near future on the Audit Commission report entitled "Misspent Youth", which was published today? The report is a devastating commentary on the failure of the youth justice system and the Government's record on youth crime, not least because it says that, although crime has doubled since the Conservatives came to office, overall, less is done now than was done a decade ago to address offending by young people. It also criticises the lack of cross-departmental co-operation to tackle those problems. Surely we should be told what action the Government intend to take. Will the Leader of the House give us an assurance that the Government will not simply bury the report and forget it? Our constituents will certainly not forget the problems that they face as a result of youth crime.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, given the events yesterday and the comments made at Prime Minister's questions today, when it was clear that the Prime Minister did not understand the significance of the documents put before European Standing Committee B yesterday—the former Paymaster General, the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) confirmed that there was not proper scrutiny in that Committee—will the Leader of the House reconsider the points that have been raised about those documents? Will he acknowledge that there are two aspects to the problem: first the importance of the documents, despite what the Prime Minister says; and, secondly, as Madam Speaker said yesterday, the fact that the issue involves maintaining the integrity of the

procedures of the House? The Leader of the House has expressed concern on many occasions about the rights of hon. Members and the reputation of the House. Will he therefore think again, and think carefully, before rejecting the idea of a full debate on the Floor of the House? The documents are important, as is the reputation of the House. The Government cannot sweep the issue away. If there is not a full debate on the Floor of the House, not only the integrity of our procedures will be at stake, but the authority of the House.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Lady has raised three issues. I am grateful for the way in which she put her point on the channel tunnel. She acknowledged that the appropriate time to consider a debate will be when we have the results of the three inquiries that are taking place. I need hardly say that I shall keep the issue very much in mind.

I suppose that I ought to observe mildly that I find some of the hon. Lady's remarks on the Audit Commission report somewhat curious, given that Labour has voted against almost all the measures that we have taken to tackle the problem of crime. Leaving that aside for the moment, while we clearly do not agree with everything in the report, it appears to endorse our strategy of intervening early with young people who might offend. I shall bring the hon. Lady's remarks to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, because we shall be publishing a Green Paper shortly. I am sure that he will take her remarks into account.

The hon. Lady will not be surprised to know that I am not in a position to add significantly to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said a few moments ago about the documents debated yesterday in European Standing Committee B. However, the notion that my right hon. Friend does not understand those matters does not correspond with reality.

No one is disputing the importance of the documents. I emphasised last week that the Standing Committee provides an opportunity for effective scrutiny. I also drew attention to the fact that there will be an opportunity—as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said—for debate before the Dublin Council to which the ECOFIN will be reporting. As for maintaining the integrity of the House's procedures, what has been proposed and is taking place is entirely within the Standing Orders of the House.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): As someone who supports the Government's position on a single currency, and therefore has no axe to grind on the issue whatever, may I ask my right hon. Friend to give serious further consideration to the issue of a debate on the documents being considered by the Select Committee on European Legislation? Is he not aware that under resolution of this House and by its Standing Orders, that Committee has a clear responsibility and duty to advise the House when specific documents should be debated by the House as a whole? It is highly undesirable—and a potentially dangerous precedent—for the Government to sweep aside a unanimous recommendation from that Committee.

Mr. Newton: Obviously, whether they come from my right hon. Friend or any other hon. Member, I always look carefully at such concerns. But since the changes to the procedures of the House—which were designed to reduce the amount of business taken on the Floor—it has been necessary for judgments to be made on particular recommendations. That has happened before, and this is not a unique occasion. I continue to believe that the debate in Committee, taken together with the opportunity for general debate before Dublin, was the right course.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Who does the Leader of the House think he is pleasing by keeping this matter off the Floor of the House? He has infuriated a large part of his own party, he will get no thanks from those of us who believe in the merits of a single currency but want to see the issues debated on the Floor of the House, and he did not save the Government from defeat in the Committee. That having happened, surely he must recognise the need for a debate on the Floor.

While we are discussing single market issues, can I draw the Leader of the House's attention to the fact that 700 UK vehicles containing food produce are being blockaded in France by French lorry drivers, with no apparent effective action being taken by the French police? Will he make sure that representations are made on this issue at the highest level? If not, we will have to return to that matter also next week.

Mr. Newton: I will ensure that the latter remarks of the right hon. Gentleman are drawn immediately to the attention of my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of Transport who, no doubt, will be concerned with that matter. On the first part of his remarks, I cannot add to what I and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister have already said.

Sir Anthony Grant (South-West Cambridgeshire): My right hon. Friend will have noted that, belatedly, the Opposition have joined the referendum bandwagon on European currency. But has he noticed that, according to a recent report, they want a referendum not on that issue alone, but on every subject under the sun? May we have an opportunity to consider the future of referendums and their use? If we go down the line suggested by the Opposition—new Labour, new policy—we all might as well go home and leave everything to be decided by opinion polls.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend makes an important point which is largely for those hon. Members at whom I am looking across the Chamber. They, no doubt, will respond in their own way to my hon. Friend's very effective point.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): May I reinforce the calls for a debate on the Floor of the House on the European regulations? I do not intend to repeat the arguments about the fact that the Select Committee was unanimous in its decision and that hardly any debate took place on the matter. I underline the fact that the Prime Minister reacted to an earlier question by saying that there was nothing in these regulations that applies to the United Kingdom. I refer the Leader of the House to the stability pact regulation, article 13, which refers to arrangements being made for sanctions and penalties on any member state that is not a part of economic and monetary union. In the circumstances, is it not imperative that we have a debate on the Floor of the House on the three vital regulations?

Mr. Newton: It is certainly important that those documents should be scrutinised and that is what we

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sought to arrange through the debate in European Standing Committee B. It appears that at least some of those present chose to raise points of order rather than to concentrate on the issues in the documents. I am not complaining about that, but equally I do not think that I can be held responsible for it. As to the question of the stability pact, whether we take part in the single currency or not, it is in this country's interest to ensure that if it goes ahead it is sustainable and does not damage our main export market.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have a debate on local government finance so that I may bring to the House's attention the cuts of £30,000 a year in adult education provision by the Labour council in Ealing? The cuts will take access to adult education away from hundreds, if not thousands, of people in Ealing, even though the Labour party professes to believe in such access. If we have a debate, I will be able to bring that disgraceful behaviour by Ealing Labour council before the House.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will have heard me make the point that there will be a statement on local government finance on the day following the Budget. He may wish to raise his point with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Since European Standing Committee B has reported to the House that it came to no resolution, is it not now the procedure, as used before, for the Leader of the House under Standing Order No. 102 to put down a motion on those three documents which must be decided forthwith? If he did that, would not he be going against the unanimous view of the Committee, under Standing Order No. 23, because the requirement for scrutiny would not have been discharged? If, however, the documents were to be debated under a motion covering a much wider range of issues, as the Prime Minister suggested this afternoon, a diverse debate would take place on no specific motion or resolution. In either case, would the requirement for scrutiny have been discharged? I suggest to the Leader of the House that it would not, and that is why we must have a debate on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Newton: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening closely to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, he would have heard him indicate that the necessary motion will be tabled in the normal way.

Mr. Michael Carttiss (Great Yarmouth): Does not my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House recognise that our hon. Friend the Member for South–West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant) has already made the valid point that we might as well all go home if we cannot discuss issues that will be fundamental? May I also ask my right hon. Friend why the Government are afraid to have the debate on the Floor of the House when the Opposition have got as much to answer for as we have?

Mr. Newton: While I agree that the matter is important, I have already made it clear that we have provided opportunity for debate in what we thought was the most appropriate way and that there will be further opportunity before the Dublin summit.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Will the Leader of the House make time for an early debate on the future of Hadrian's wall? Is he aware that the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) yesterday raised the prospect of the wall being policed to keep out the Scots? Is the Leader of the House further aware that when people in the north get to hear about that, there is a grave danger that they will descend on the wall in their thousands and remove it, stone by stone, several hundred miles to the south so that they, and their good neighbours the Scots, might be on the opposite side to the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield? Indeed, members of the public from all over Britain would gladly and enthusiastically rebuild the wall in a circle around the hon. Gentleman and his like.

Mr. Newton: I am slightly at a loss for words for once, but I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that his point could be in order in the debate on tourism.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On the subject of the stability pact, which was not, before the Leader of the Opposition blundered in this afternoon, a party political issue, but an issue between Parliament and the Executive, will my right hon. Friend give an undertaking that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will not agree to anything at the ECOFIN Council in Dublin? By not having a debate before the Council meets, the Government are riding roughshod over Parliament and they are being contemptuous of democracy. In that case, why should they deserve support and why should anybody hold their Whip?

Mr. Newton: I appreciate the strength of my hon. Friend's feelings, and I was grateful for his courtesy in coming to see me the other night, as I hope he will not mind my mentioning, in order to underline his point. I recognise that, but the fact is that we have provided opportunity for debate, and I have now said several times that there will be further opportunity before the Dublin Council.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Will the Leader of the House consider arranging a debate on the rules governing eligibility for incapacity benefit? I ask that because of the number of complaints that I receive from people in my constituency, which is one of the poorest in the country. I am thinking in particular of the case of David Holmes, who for more than a decade suffered from a severe heart complaint and received incapacity benefit and mobility allowance. As others were, he was called up for examination to see whether he could continue to receive those benefits, and after the examination he was declared fit for work. That put tremendous pressure on him, as he recorded in a letter sent to the Department of Social Security. A few days later David died—from a massive heart attack, it was believed. Is it not now time to examine the rules governing the benefit?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that, even were I in a position to do so, it would be wrong for me to attempt to comment on the details of that particular case—although, naturally, I hear of the outcome with

great sympathy for the family and all those involved. I shall of course, as is right, bring the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, and I am sure that he will consider them carefully.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Is my right hon. Friend aware that almost all the police agencies in the country, the Security Service, and even Customs and Excise, are united in the belief that there is one measure that the Government could adopt which would assist in the fight against crime? That would be to allow telephone intercepts to be used in evidence in court. Is my right hon. Friend aware of the curious ambiguity that allows intercepted conversations recorded in America, but not recordings made in this country, to be used in the courts in this country? Does he accept that there may be an opportunity to amend the Crime (Sentences) Bill to allow those intercepts to be used in criminal prosecutions?

Mr. Newton: I cannot offer my hon. Friend an immediate judgment; in any case it would not be for me to decide whether an amendment to the Crime (Sentences) Bill would be in order. However, I shall ensure that his thoughts on the matter are drawn to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the Leader of House encourage the Secretary of State for Scotland to make a statement next week about his delays in implementing the report concerning the interconnector between Scotland and Northern Ireland? This is the second time within less than two weeks that the actions of the person who claims to stand for the Union have militated against the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland, and in this case also against the interests of the miners of Scotland, who could be producing the power.

Mr. Newton: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will study the hon. Gentleman's words with care.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): As Leader of the House, my right hon. Friend will agree with the general proposition that matters touching on the constitutional powers of the House should always be debated on the Floor of the House; it was a mistake to take the matter in question in a specialist Committee with limited membership and time. May I press him a little further beyond what he has already said and remind him that we are talking about draft European regulations, and that once such regulations are agreed in the Council of Ministers, they are directly binding in their entirety on the citizens of each member state, without any further reference to the House of Commons? I therefore ask him not to draft a motion simply inviting the House to take note, but to use a substantive motion asking us to approve, and to say whether we agree to the transfer of our powers as suggested in the regulations.

Mr. Newton: On the first part of what my right hon. Friend said, I need to underline, as the Prime Minister did, the fact that the fundamental protection for the rights of the House is the opt-out itself, as negotiated at Maastricht, together with the fact that the House and the country will have a proper opportunity to consider whether it is in this country's interest to join a single currency when that decision needs to be taken. On the remainder of my right hon. Friend's remarks, I do not think that I can add to what I said earlier.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Is the Leader of the House aware that the proposals for a stability pact mean a change in the operation of the Maastricht treaty as it applies to excessive deficits? The Maastricht treaty was debated on the Floor, approved and ratified by Her Majesty's Government. Should not a change in its operation also be debated on the Floor?

Mr. Newton: I do not accept the right hon. Gentleman's interpretation. It is certainly the case that the Maastricht treaty sets out the basis of the stability pact, but it also makes it clear that no fines or other sanctions could apply to Britain unless we were in the single currency.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Has my right hon. Friend seen the article in *The Times* today about the remarkable improvement of British beaches as a result of the privatisation of the water companies? May we have a debate on the Environment Agency? An anomaly has arisen on the Isle of Wight whereby Ventnor achieved the standard but does not have a sewage scheme, while Ryde failed to but does have one. The Environment Agency does not know why.

Mr. Newton: I cannot comment on the precise position in the Isle of Wight, but the bathing water quality results for 1996 certainly show a further increase in the number of bathing waters that meet the key standards of the directive, which is good news for all concerned.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): The Leader of the House will understand now, if he did not before, that the House of Commons is strongly committed to the need for open discussion of sensitive political issues on the Floor. I hope that he will therefore be prepared to ask the Secretary of State for Transport to explain to the House next week article 33 of the intergovernmental convention with the French on the channel tunnel, which ensures that total confidentiality of information will not apply in any investigation of what happened in the channel tunnel during the fire.

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is, as the hon. Lady will have registered, due to answer questions next Monday. I will bring that possible question to his attention.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): May I implore my right hon. Friend to think again about a debate on the stability pact? It is a constitutional issue that has not had adequate scrutiny. Does he appreciate the size of the bundle of documents involved? Many of the proposals can be changed by qualified majority voting and will, or could be made to, apply to Britain whether or not we are members of the single currency. Does he understand how sensitive we are after Britain was double-crossed over the social chapter opt-out? It is vital that the matter should be scrutinised on the Floor. It is not sensible for the Government to take on the whole Chamber.

Mr. Newton: I of course note what my hon. Friend said and, as with my hon. Friend the Member for

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Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), the strength of feeling. It must by now be apparent that, with what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said earlier and what I have sought to say in the past few minutes, there is little more that I can add.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I refer the Leader of the House to early-day motion 209.

[*That this House congratulates Karamjit Singh Chahal on his release after more than six years from Bedford Prison following the landmark judgment concerning his case by the European Court of Human Rights; is delighted Mr. Chahal was freed, enabling him to rejoin his wife and two British-born children in Luton; believes Raghbir Singh, detained in Birmingham on national security grounds, should now be released; urges Her Majesty's Government to scrap the Advisory Committee on National Security—the so-called 'three wise men'—which is an outdated and unjust procedure, as was recognised by the ECHR; further urges Her Majesty's Government to ensure that in any future cases concerning national security the accused and the courts are given adequate factual information about alleged national security breaches; and believes the Labour Party must commit itself to introducing such legal reforms if Her Majesty's Government fails to act.*]

I tried to discover whether my constituent, Raghbir Singh, would be released from prison after being held for 18 months with no charges. Will the right hon. Gentleman find out the latest position, which I have been unable to obtain from the Home Secretary's private office? If Raghbir Singh is to remain in prison, despite last week's ruling by the European Court of Human Rights in an identical case where a person was held for five years without charges, will the Home Secretary make a statement to the House to justify his being held in prison without charges?

Mr. Newton: I will bring the hon. Gentleman's concern to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): My right hon. Friend will know that I have raised this issue for three weeks running and it will not surprise him to learn that I am going to raise it again: a debate on the Floor on the proceedings that took place in European Standing Committee B yesterday. These matters do not solely concern countries that will be in the single currency; there are huge matters that concern those who will be outside it. Further recommendations on the restriction of the powers of national Parliaments are among the matters that will be passed by the ECOFIN Council. Will he please, please listen to what we are saying and give us some time on the Floor?

Mr. Newton: I am not surprised, and I do not resent my hon. Friend, with his well-known and long-standing interest in these matters, raising the matter again in this way. It is precisely because arrangements of that kind do have effects, even on non-members, that it is important that we should play a part in the discussions.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House confirm that it would be a very shabby decision by the Government to put down a "forthwith" motion about a matter that had gone to a Committee but that had not been agreed by that Committee, in the knowledge that they would be able to sneak it through in the Table Office, at a time that was inconvenient to others, even a non-sitting day? Will he also confirm that it is possible, if we catch him laying that motion in time, that we could table an amendment to it and that, even though it could not be debated on the Floor of the House, we would be able to divide on that amendment; or that, failing to put an amendment down, we could divide on the motion?

As Leader of the House, will the right hon. Gentleman be generous enough and decent enough to ensure that, if he puts down that motion in that fashion and refuses a proper debate on a subject that undoubtedly affects a majority of hon. Members on both sides of the House, people are told in advance so that we can have a legitimate vote—even though we would like a debate—and so that we can send it back whence it came?

Mr. Newton: I said earlier, as did my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, that the necessary motion would be tabled and moved in due course.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): My right hon. Friend will be aware that many of my constituents are involved in the road haulage industry, carrying British exports through the port of Dover and on into Europe. Many of my constituents' companies are faced with enormous difficulties as a result of the outrageous dispute in the French road haulage industry, which is blocking the roads. Can we have an urgent statement, and can that statement be given after a Foreign Office Minister has been sent to the Ministry of Justice in Paris—preferably either by air or by ferry from Dover, rather than via the channel tunnel, which is currently experiencing difficulties? Can we make sure that that British Foreign Minister gives the Ministry in Paris the firm impression that we really mean business and that the police in France must enforce the law and ensure that British lorries can carry British goods into Europe?

Mr. Newton: I made some reference to that matter earlier on, when it was raised by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). All that I can add at this stage is that both my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary are due to answer questions next week.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): Is the Leader of the House aware that his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) was quite shameful? He will not even promise the House that sufficient notice will be given of a motion being tabled to give us an opportunity to respond. In those circumstances, why should those of us who have been members, since their start, of the Select Committee on European Legislation or European Standing Committees continue to plod away, time after time, at rather unglamorous activities? Those bodies should discuss matters of the sort that are down to be considered next week, not a measure that is of such significance that the members of the Select Committee are united in asking for it to be dealt with in

the Chamber. We should have what my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover asked for; it is the least that the Leader of the House should offer at this time.

Mr. Newton: I note that request, as I noted the request from the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). I have to say that I do not think that the answer I gave the hon. Gentleman was in any way shameful.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): May I say to my right hon. Friend that the matters on the stability pact that were very briefly discussed in Committee yesterday were not mere technicalities?

May I say to my right hon. Friend that it saddens me to see him, as a custodian of the responsibilities of this place, risk his reputation and risk also an allegation that he has been a willing participant in a disreputable subterfuge? Can he now assure the House that, in the two days of Government business next week, he will allow a proper opportunity for the House to debate the merits or otherwise of a stability pact before the Chancellor goes to Dublin, potentially to stitch us up into something from which we cannot withdraw?

I say to my right hon. Friend that I now comprehend the rage that filled the breasts of the parliamentarians in the civil war in this country and of the colonists in the American revolutionary war; the issue at stake on both occasions was an abuse of Executive power.

Mr. Newton: I would obviously much regret it, and with some feeling, were my hon. Friend to feel as he suggested in some of his comments, but I have made it clear that we do anticipate further opportunity for debate before the Dublin Council.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Has the Leader of the House noticed that one of our more enthusiastic Europeans, Mr. Sean Connery, who spends more time in Spain as a tax exile than he does at home, is returning to these shores to make a party political broadcast for the Scottish National party? Does he agree that some time should be devoted in the Chamber to considering the rules under which people can be tax exiles, whether it is appropriate for someone to avoid paying taxes in this country but to influence the votes of his fellow citizens, and approximately how much money is lost to the Exchequer by the system of permitting people to avoid tax by living abroad?

Mr. Newton: It would appear to me that, with the imminence of five days' debate on the Budget, the hon. Lady should have an opportunity to raise that point.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May we have a debate next week on competitive tendering? During the debate, tenderers in our constituencies could be fully advised of the booking arrangements for them to have lunches with the chairmen of the committees that take decisions; I am sure that the Liberal spokesman in that debate would oblige the House.

Mr. Newton: There is a Liberal spokesman in his place. I do not know whether he will oblige the House, but I am sure that he listened carefully to what my hon. Friend said.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Will the Leader of the House clarify what kind of motion he intends to table to enable us to debate the stability pact papers? Is he saying that, during another debate, he nevertheless will table a motion either to take note of or to approve the documents concerned?

Mr. Newton: What I have indicated, I believe both last week and this, is that I anticipate the type of general debate before the Dublin Council that we have had on previous occasions.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate on the use of the English language? Is he aware that individuals tour the country, saying that services are underfunded, expecting their audiences to assume that that is a spending pledge, and then complaining like billy-o when someone tries to quantify the extent of that extra spending?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. There may well be opportunities for him to speak during the debate on the Budget, which also covers public expenditure.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I realise that being repetitive makes one unpopular; similarly, disagreeing with one's own Government makes one feel even more unpopular. But may I say as gently as I possibly can that I believe that my right hon. Friend is profoundly wrong not to allow the House to debate fully and to vote on the matters that were not scrutinised yesterday?

Mr. Newton: I do not in any way resent the repetition by my hon. Friend. Unless I am to repeat the same things over and over again, however, I do not think that I can add to what I said earlier.

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): May I support the plea of the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) to bring the Secretary of State for Scotland to this place to tell the House why he has overturned the decision of the recorder on that specific aspect of the interconnector between Ireland and Scotland? There has been a six-month inquiry. I learned today from a press release which I happened to get from Dover house—because I asked for it—that the recommendation is that the decision of the recorder on this important link between Northern Ireland and Scotland be overturned.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will already have heard me undertake to bring that concern, expressed earlier but now underlined by him, to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): Will the Leader of the House—some time before next Easter while he is still Leader of the House—arrange for a statement by the Government, or preferably a debate in Government time, in which they can make clear their views on the community's role in respect of an opencast mining proposal which is so large that four constituencies are directly affected? On such an important matter, the community's say should be clear; it is not clear in the

[Mr. John Gunnell]

minerals planning guidance. We need an opportunity to debate what powers the community has to ensure that such a proposal does not go forward.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will be well aware that questions concerning the minerals planning guidance are primarily for the Secretary of State for the Environment, to whose attention I shall ensure that his remarks are brought.

Madam Speaker's Statement

4.11 pm

Madam Speaker: I have a short statement to make. On Monday, the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) raised with me the question of communication between Members and civil servants in the officials' Box. She referred to incidents that occurred on Friday, when it appeared that Back-Bench Members were being directly briefed by officials. My deputy in the Chair at the time last Friday dealt properly with the points of order raised with her.

It may be helpful if I make clear to the House the conventions that apply in this case. The officials' Box is intended for civil servants and political advisers with civil service status whose attendance is deemed essential by the Minister responsible. Their attendance is by my permission, and a list of names is required to be submitted to my office in advance. Their function is to provide information and briefing to Ministers as required.

It follows that in general the only Members who should approach the Box are the Minister concerned, the parliamentary private secretary or, in the absence of the latter, another Member operating with the Minister's authority. There may be other occasions when it makes sense for a Member on either side of the House to approach the Box—for example, to check an apparently inaccurate fact or a reference in a Government document under discussion—but I would expect such occasions to be very rare indeed.

I do not regard it as acceptable for Members to engage in social discussions with officials in the Box, since this could be open to misinterpretation and cause irritation to other Members.

There is one other point that I should like to underline. Officials in the Box are required to conduct themselves discreetly at all times. In particular, they should not show any partiality in the course of a debate. I am glad to say that this is an issue which has been raised with the Chair on very few occasions—although there should never be cause for it to be drawn to my attention again.

Points of Order

4.12 pm

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Has the Secretary of State for Social Security given you notice that he intends to come before the House to make a statement on his proposals on chronic bronchitis and emphysema? He has today answered a written question in which he proposes to implement in full the recommendations of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council as from next April and without retrospection.

I have checked with the company that now manages the mineworkers pension scheme, which informs me that an average of 700 elderly miners die each month. That means that, in the 14 months between the end of the review and implementation of the recommendations next April, roughly 10,000 miners will have died. I am not saying that all of them would have had a claim, but a good number of them would have. It is very important that the Secretary of State should come to the House to make a statement so that we can question him on these matters.

Madam Speaker: I have not been informed that the Secretary of State is seeking to make a statement on that matter. Had that been the case today, we would have known it already, because it would have appeared on the Annunciator.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will know that it is the unanimous view of the Select Committee on European Legislation that scrutiny should not be given to the package of financial measures unless and until there is a debate on the Floor of the House. You will know that it is possible for the Government to table a "forthwith" motion, and that that could be done late in the evening when no Member was available to table an amendment. In that case, it would be possible for some Members to seek to put a manuscript amendment before the House the following day. Given that the powers of the House are at stake—democracy is at stake—if a manuscript amendment were tabled in such circumstances, can you give an assurance that you would look favourably upon it?

Madam Speaker: It is hypothetical at this time, but I would look very carefully at any manuscript amendment that came my way.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Yesterday at Question Time I asked the Secretary of State for Scotland a question. He replied that the social work department of Glasgow district council was unsure how many social workers it employs. That is an inaccurate statement. I have evidence from the Glasgow social work department that it knows how many staff and social workers it employs. Furthermore, the Scottish Office was informed of those numbers some time ago. The Secretary of State should have checked with his Department so that he could give the House accurate information. I ask that he should come before the House and clear up that misunderstanding.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman might like to consider an Adjournment debate, which would allow him to air the problems of his local authority and give the correct figures.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I refer to Standing Order No. 102(9), which states:

"If any motion is made in the House in relation to any European Community document".

I raise this point of order in the context of European Standing Committee B. Clearly, Standing Order No. 102(9) is inconclusive, as the wording is "If any motion", not "Any motion must be". Will you ensure that there must be a report back, and that time is allowed for Back Benchers or other Members to table amendments to the motion?

Madam Speaker: I refer the hon. Gentleman and the House to the statement that I made yesterday.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will know that from time to time hon. Members have been concerned about the fact that, with regard to the agencies that the Government have set up, statements have been made without parliamentary debate or questioning of Ministers. Yesterday evening a journalist gave guidance to my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) that there would be a statement today on prisons. On inquiring, my hon. Friend discovered that there would be no ministerial statement, but a press release from the director of prisons dealing with release and other aspects with which I would have some sympathy. By allowing such statements to be made outside the House by those who are not directly answerable to the House, we have gone too far: there is no opportunity for proper scrutiny. I hope that that will be borne in mind in future.

Madam Speaker: I am sure that those on the Treasury Bench will have heard what the hon. Gentleman said about press releases in advance of statements in the House.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You have heard several Members mention, and the Leader of the House say two or three times, that the Prime Minister said that a "forthwith" motion would be tabled. I checked with one or two of my hon. Friends, who say that they did not hear that, but we must assume that such a motion may be tabled. The Leader of the House—who has, unfortunately, departed—refused to assure you and the House that such a motion would be tabled in such a way as to allow considered amendments to be tabled for your possible selection. Will you give an assurance that if any hon. Member moved the Adjournment of the House prior to such a motion being taken forthwith, you would look upon it favourably?

Madam Speaker: I can give no commitments to the hon. Gentleman, but I have noted his comments.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Will you give your support to a rough

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sleepers initiative for the benefit of hon. Members? You may be aware that last night five hon. Members slept rough in the room opposite the Public Bill Office in order to secure ten-minute Bill time. Conditions were most uncomfortable, but we had the opportunity for in-depth discussion and we agreed that the procedure should be abandoned in favour of selecting hon. Members perhaps in the same way as they are selected for oral questions. We believe that the present procedure is archaic and inefficient. It wastes time, it is unfair to female Members of Parliament and it has no place in a modern Parliament.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I support the hon. Gentleman in his request for a much better system. Last night and in the early hours of this morning, I flatly refused to sleep in a small conference room on the Committee Corridor with three gentlemen. *[Interruption.]* I would not consider sleeping with Conservative Members of Parliament and I certainly would not sleep with Labour Members.

Madam Speaker: I have noted the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), who raised the original point of order. I understand that a relevant report from the Procedure Committee of the last Parliament remains on the table. The hon. Gentleman may wish to ask that Committee to consider the matter again.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware that last night there was a massive power failure on the London underground which trapped many thousands of Londoners in tunnels for more than an hour. I had hoped for a ministerial statement on the subject, but obviously one was not requested.

Without claiming special treatment for Members of Parliament, those hon. Members who do not drive around in chauffeured limos with police outriders would like to be informed of any problems on the underground before we attempted to travel on it. Madam Speaker, could you request London Underground authorities to inform you if such an event occurs again so that hon. Members and their staff may be warned before they try to use the underground system?

Madam Speaker: I do not think that there is anything special about hon. Members and their staff: they are treated like any other Londoners as far as I am concerned.

Mr. Banks: Yes, badly.

Madam Speaker: You should live above the shop, as I do.

Windfall Tax

4.22 pm

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the dangers and injustices inherent in the concept of a windfall tax on the privatised utilities and condemns a tax that would hit consumers, shareholders and pensioners while damaging the credibility of the United Kingdom as a stable regime for inward investment.

It is now more than four years since the old Labour shadow Chancellor announced Labour's big idea of a windfall tax. Its very name implied that somehow money was there for the taking, that no one would feel the impact, and that fat cats would be punished appropriately. It implied that somehow Labour had found a pot of fool's gold with which to pay for its ever-lengthening list of unquantified spending commitments. It was a tax for the moment: a headline grabber; a soundbite tax.

Four years later, old Labour is gone and the old Labour shadow Chancellor has become the new Labour shadow Chancellor. However, the windfall relic has survived that cultural revolution—the windfall tax lives on.

Four years later, not even the most basic calculation or clarification has been advanced as to what the Labour party proposes. Every day, often in newspapers that are normally sympathetic to the Labour party, the chorus of condemnation grows. I quote from *The Independent* business section earlier this month:

"this is a tax hard to justify and hard to implement . . . Labour's tax lawyers and financial advisers are still, years after the proposal was mooted, wrestling with the legal difficulties of defining those the party wants to penalise."

No Conservative Member could have put it more clearly.

Today, we are providing an opportunity for the Labour party to come clean, to answer the questions, to spell out the costs, and, above all, to let the British people know what the windfall tax will cost every one of them.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid–Kent): Does my right hon. Friend believe that the windfall tax is a pledge or a commitment, in the phraseology used so often by the shadow Chancellor?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is neither a pledge nor commitment; just a downright threat, I would have thought.

If one is to create the concept of a tax, people are entitled to ask who will have to pay; how much they will pay; where the lines will be drawn; how the victims will be defined; how the legal challenges will be avoided; how to stand up to the already audible cries of protest from international investors. It is interesting: in the most successful part of the rejuvenation of our economy in the constituencies of the Labour party are inward investors, who come to this country because it is the enterprise centre of Europe. Yet what do we hear? The moment attention is drawn to these people, the Labour party goes back to its old tricks of sneering at anything that smacks of an enterprise economy.

The Labour party is so subliminally ashamed of the concept that it has invented a tax that it is now trying to call it a levy—old taxes, new levies. It amounts to an unprecedented attack on our privatised industries. Is it an

attack on all of them, or just some of them? If it is only some of them, which ones? If we are looking at only some of them, how will that be defined when drafting legislation? Which sectors of British industry have been singled out as the old-style milch cow for new-style Labour taxes?

The Labour party has yet to explain which companies it defines as utilities, let alone which utilities are covered. Indeed, we have it clearly on the record. At the Labour party conference, the Leader of the Opposition said that there would be a one-off windfall levy on the excess profits of the privatised monopoly utilities.

Sir Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): My right hon. Friend will have received a letter, as will the Leader of the Opposition, from Yorkshire Electricity, pointing out that, before privatisation, it paid £41 million in tax, and that it now pays £90 million in tax. It has pointed out that its prices have been reduced in real terms by 25 per cent. It has also pointed out the effect of a windfall tax on jobs, investment and prices.

Does my right hon. Friend agree, having read the letter, that, in the end, it is the people who use electricity who will pay; that it is the investors who look forward who will pay? In other words, the Labour party is penalising people for its own ends, and it knows not why.

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I happen to have the letter to hand. It is interesting that the Labour party laughs at the effects that will flow to the constituents in Yorkshire, which are clearly set out in the letter from Yorkshire Electricity. What will the tax do? It will

"undermine our ability to sustain the current level of investment . . . affect jobs . . . increase prices to customers in the longer term . . . reduce dividend income for our shareholders, over 100,000 of whom live in our region and are also customers",

and

"reduce pensioners' income as many of our large shareholders are pension funds."

That is what the windfall tax will do in Yorkshire, to the people who are expected to vote for the Labour party, which will introduce the tax, which will penalise the constituents on whose votes it depends.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): When my right hon. Friend sees today's *Yorkshire Post*, he will see that the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), the deputy leader of the Labour party, sneered at journalists who were gathered in Yorkshire, and told them to talk to business men. Labour authorities were being accused of penalising pensioners in the same way as the windfall tax would penalise them. All that the right hon. Gentleman could say was, "Go and talk to the business men."

The Deputy Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman would be better advised to talk to pensioners and employees. *[Interruption.]* Yes, to the pensioners who own shares in the companies on which the Labour party intends to impose a windfall tax. Those are the people to whom he should talk.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It is nothing short of sheer hypocrisy for the Government, and the right hon. Gentleman in particular, to attack the Labour party on its proposals for a windfall tax on public utilities—for which Conservative Members act in a consultative capacity, and which give money to the Tory party for its election funds—when that same Government, of which the right hon. Gentleman was a member, some years ago decided to impose a windfall tax on the banks. What is the difference between a windfall tax on banks and a windfall tax on the fat cats who are close to Tory Members?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Why does not the hon. Gentleman ask trade unions, which invested funds in the utilities? For taking the trouble to support the election of a Labour Government—if that were ever to happen—trade unions would have a windfall tax imposed on them.

The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is simple: the tax on the banks in 1981 reflected the fact that large numbers of British depositors attracted no interest on their deposits. That enabled banks to make a one-off large capital gain, which was legitimate. That has nothing to do with the free market operation of selling shares in companies that were floated at a price that the market commanded—they are two totally different circumstances.

To understand the dilemma that faces anyone seriously trying to do business with the Labour party, let us take the dilemma of the chief executive of PowerGen, Mr. Ed Wallis. He made a simple mistake, because he took new Labour at its new face value. He was asked a straight question by a Select Committee of the House, and, being a straight guy, he gave a straight answer. He told the Select Committee that his company, PowerGen, not being a monopoly, would escape the tax. No one can blame him for saying that, because he had the full authority of no less a figure than Alastair Campbell to give him confidence.

In a letter written to *The Independent* on 5 November, Alastair Campbell confirmed that the tax would hit only monopolies. No sooner had Mr. Campbell offered that helpful confirmation than up popped someone else, rather more modestly referred to in *The Daily Telegraph* as merely a spokesperson for the shadow Chancellor. He set out the shadow Chancellor's view, which was totally different from the view that was previously believed and trusted in by Mr. Wallis. The spokesman said that, in principle, all privatised utilities will be considered, and that the Labour party will not want to discriminate unfairly.

I am sure that it will be a relief to all those who work in the privatised utilities to know that Labour is not aiming to discriminate unfairly. There will be no unfair discrimination: that is clear. In its place will be fair discrimination. What is fair discrimination, and when will the Leader of the Opposition and his shadow Chancellor reach agreement on a definition of who will pay the tax?

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): Does my right hon. Friend recall that the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) was reported to have said on the wireless that she would be prepared to include in a windfall tax the British Airports Authority and British Airways? Does he think that that inclusion could be extended to successful, semi-monopoly companies such as British Aerospace, which he and I know well? What would be the implications for those three companies of this iniquitous windfall tax?

[Mr. Robert Atkins]

The Deputy Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend asks an inevitable question. A refusal to define the tax base means that anyone who is interested in his or her tax liabilities will be unable to establish the risks of a Labour Government. It is, of course, precisely because the Labour party does not want anyone to be able to define the precise risks that its members will not answer the basic questions.

What this is really all about is a Labour attack on the successful privatised companies. What, in truth, do monopolies mean in a world in which competition is increasingly spreading all the time? Labour Members are incapable of answering that question.

I am talking not just about British Telecom, which patently faces world competition today, or about the domestic gas market, in which we have opened up competition and in which prices are adjusting downwards in those circumstances. There has been a massive reduction in electricity prices as a result of privatisation. Even in the water industry, we are now consulting about the possibility of greater competition. The fact is that, when Labour Members talk about monopolies, they completely fail to appreciate the revolution in competitive practice that is sweeping the country, and, indeed, the global market.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Deputy Prime Minister confirm that, last year, Treasury officials considered recommending that the Government introduce a windfall tax, and that some Ministers were in favour of it, including Cabinet Ministers? Is that not the truth?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We have never proposed to introduce a windfall tax related in any way to the Labour party's proposals. There is not a shred of evidence that members of this Government have supported such a proposal, and the Labour party knows it.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is it true that the Chairman of the 1922 Committee—a Conservative Committee—expressed support for a windfall tax? Can the Deputy Prime Minister stand at that Dispatch Box and absolutely deny that any member of the British Cabinet has expressed support for a windfall tax in the past two years? Let us have a denial from the Dispatch Box.

The Deputy Prime Minister: This is rich. We cannot get an answer from the Labour party about who will pay, how much they will pay or which companies will pay, and the hon. Gentleman thinks that he can divert attention from the bankruptcy of Labour's ideas by asking questions to which he knows the answers as well as I do. There are no proposals for a windfall tax in the Conservative party, there never have been, and as far as the present Government are concerned, there never will be. Let us be quite clear about that.

Business people, to their cost, have a tendency to take new Labour's words at face value. "Blind trust", I think, is the term for it. That is a very dangerous thing to do with new Labour. New Labour's policies are not about specific proposals; they are about winks, nods, sideways glances, hints and suggestions. They are about anything other than the facts and the details. The fact is that, the more questions are asked, the more the realisation grows—as my right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) pointed out—that behind the windfall tax there is a bill: a real bill, for real people to pay.

The owners of our privatised companies today comprise millions of individuals who had the faith to buy those companies with their own savings in a free market. Ten million shareholders have pensions and insurance policies based on extensive investment in the utilities—British pensioners, whose pension values are now threatened by Labour's determination to tax them retrospectively, as an act of vicious political spite.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): On a day when the Government are unable or unwilling to find time to debate the implications of European monetary union, the Government have time to attack Opposition policies and yesterday civil servants were involved in costing Opposition promises. Who has time to run the country?

The Deputy Prime Minister: As we have the most successful economy in western Europe, it is pretty obvious that it is the Government who have the time to run the country.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): On business confidence in political parties, will the Deputy Prime Minister join me in congratulating the directors of the Haymarket Group, who made the shrewd decision in 1994 to make no donation to the Conservative party?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have nothing to do with the management of the company, but it made up for that in 1995.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in that fascinating and candid letter from Mr. Chatwin, chief executive of Yorkshire Electricity Group, he says:

"that threat of a Windfall Tax is depressing our share price which makes us far more vulnerable to take-over".

Does not Labour's stakeholder tax make it more likely that successful British companies will fall into foreign hands?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is a classic situation. The Labour party did everything in its power to undercut the value of nationalised industries at the time of their flotation. Every political smear was used to keep prices down. Now we have made a success of them, it is undermining their success in the marketplace. As my hon. Friend says, that means that, if there were to be a takeover bid, the acquisition price would be lower. The Labour party has played politics with vital British assets.

If we are to make this economy the most successful in Europe, as we want to, we must attract inward investment into Britain. I wonder whether the Labour party has thought through exactly what it is doing. What will happen when overseas companies, having acquired British companies, are threatened retrospectively with a tax? What does Labour think will happen in the rest of the world when British companies seek to develop there? Does it think that such a tax, retrospectively and arbitrarily imposed on overseas companies in Britain,

would be quietly accepted by overseas Governments? Of course it would not. There would be retaliation and pressures. The Labour party lives in a naive world if it thinks that British interests would not be damaged by the tax that it is contemplating.

Sir Jim Spicer (West Dorset): Directly on the question not of inward investment into Britain, but of British investment overseas, my right hon. Friend will know better than most hon. Members the expertise that many of our privatised companies have built up. They go out, do the consultancy work and spearhead jobs for other British companies overseas. Does he think that those consultancies, which do not bring in a vast amount of money but help enormously in the export sector, will continue at the same scale if we go down this road?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The windfall tax will have wide ramifications, because it will prejudice the good name of Britain as a home for inward investment. That will affect British companies' reputation, which is a priceless asset, in both manufacturing and service industries throughout the world. The Labour party cannot live with the fact that, having fought to prevent privatisation all through the 1980s and still today in the 1990s, there is not a country left in the world that subscribes to its attitudes to ownership of industry. We have utterly won the intellectual argument, and virtually every country is privatising its industries.

The Labour party cannot live with the success that we forced through the House, despite its opposition, to the immense benefit of Britain's public. It simply cannot contemplate the thought that a nationalised industry has, for example, reduced its prices, improved its service or expanded into overseas markets, but that is what has happened, to the immense benefit of our economy. What, therefore, does Labour want to do? It wants to punish the companies that made it possible.

Labour cannot live with the thought that British Telecom has reduced prices by around 40 per cent. in real terms since privatisation, that it has brought huge improvements to its customers and that it is now a major internationally competitive company. Labour cannot stand the thought that British Gas has penetrated markets in more than 20 countries, bringing enormous new opportunities and jobs for Britain, or that water companies are investing more than £3 billion a year since privatisation, improving water quality and the infrastructure. The figures before privatisation, under the last Labour Government, were roughly half of what is now being spent by the privatised companies, which plan to invest a further £24 billion between now and the year 2005.

I was in the House, as some of my right hon. and hon. Friends were, in the 1970s when the Labour party slaughtered the water industry's investment programmes. We are still suffering the consequences of the fact that, when the International Monetary Fund came here and took over the running of our economy, at the top of the list of the cuts were the nationalised water industries. Labour cannot forgive the fact that we have restored that investment and doubled it.

What it comes to is that the Labour party wants to punish success. That affects everyone with a telephone, a gas bill, an electricity bill and a water bill. This is not a levy on utilities, but a tax on everyone who lives in Britain.

One might reasonably ask, therefore: how much is Labour going to seek to raise by way of a windfall tax and how many years in a row does it intend to do it? The concept of a windfall tax was that it could be levied just once, in one year, but the one-year-alone policy has now conveniently disappeared from view. It was *The Guardian* today that explained it. It says that the shadow Chancellor

"twice pledged in his conference speech"

to abolish the 16-hour rule. We put the cost of that at £875 million—*[Interruption.]* Just like Labour Members now, the shadow Chancellor protested vigorously, but let me quote from *The Guardian*:

"Abolishing the 16-hour rule is part of Labour's plan to up-skill the workforce, and is likely to happen swiftly. The windfall tax is supposed to pay for it—but there is only one windfall, and a permanent increase in spending. Direct hit by the Government."

That is not from a Tory newspaper. That is the basis of the mounting criticism that is being levied across the spectrum at Labour's windfall tax.

There is therefore a simple choice, and the Labour party should come clean. Either this is a total confidence trick, with the Labour party making on-going commitments that will not be funded by a one-off tax—and therefore the commitments will not be met—or this is not a one-off tax, because, once Labour has tasted blood, why should it not go on gnawing relentlessly away? Either way, we should be told. Is it a one-off windfall tax or will it be an annual levy to pay for Labour's commitments?

Of course the Labour party has not answered the questions and I have little expectation that it will try, but the House has been helped by Goldman Sachs International Ltd. It has told us what it thinks a windfall tax is going to amount to. It could be up to £5 billion, it says, although other people suggest higher figures. I expect that, somehow or other, in all those forays to the City, with a nod here and a wink there, those clever bankers have worked it out. That of course is extremely convenient for the Labour party, because it will not give the figures. If the Opposition won the election, however, they would then be able to say, "Of course everyone knew what our windfall tax would do. It was all there in the newspapers about the £5 billion. Didn't you read what the City commentators told us? We never issued a denial at the time, so it was obvious that we were going to raise those sums of money."

The Opposition have never answered any questions, but they will not deny the sums that people are bandying around. It is right that the Opposition should come clean on this matter. They should tell us what the facts are. If they do not, they cannot blame us for making our own assumptions and calculations.

Underlying the issue is the fundamental fallacy of the concept of a windfall tax. In Labour's dream world, the idea is that somehow one can pluck money out of the air, and somehow there is a pot of molten gold to be poured down into the national economy, all without any consequences. Nothing could be more typical of the naive and self-serving approach of the Labour party. Nothing could show more clearly that the windfall tax would be a new tax imposed on business by people who know nothing about business, but of course know a great deal about taxes.

Has the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) told people in all seriousness that the tax would not have any knock-on effects on businesses,

[Sir Jim Spicer]

shareholders, investment, jobs, inward investment and confidence? Is he telling us that one can take £5 billion from a limited number of companies with no consequences?

The fact is that windfall taxes, like any other, must come from somewhere—in this case from British companies. They would be forced to pay higher taxes, and they would have a limited number of means of dealing with that. One of them is to raise prices. That is in no way surprising to the shadow Chancellor, because he admitted as much recently, when he said that prices would not be allowed to rise. If those prices are not to be allowed to rise, how would he stop them? Would he give a direction to the regulators to make sure that those prices did not rise? Are we going to have a prices policy for the utilities controlled by politicians in Whitehall? Is that what will happen?

The shadow Chancellor has already said that he would be prepared to stop prices rising as a result of a windfall tax, but another alternative is open to those companies—to cut their investment programmes. That, of course, would have an effect on jobs, rising standards and the competitiveness of our companies. We would then be back exactly where we were in the 1970s when the Labour party was in power. As we know, whenever the Opposition are in power, unemployment rises, and we are faced with that prospect yet again. That, together with the inflationary record of the Labour party, is an old, familiar and depressing story.

Sir Cranley Onslow (Woking): Is my right hon. Friend aware that evidence given to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry this week suggests that London Electricity would cut its investment programme if it faced a windfall tax?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am extremely aware of exactly the dangers that my right hon. Friend has pointed out. The fact is that either prices would go up or investment would be cut as a result of the imposition of the windfall tax. There is no loose cash sitting about with no purpose in the pockets of British companies. A windfall tax would affect prices or jobs, or both. That is its only consequence.

I know perfectly well that it is the determination of the Labour party to give the impression that it is a painless tax, but to answer no questions about it. I am certainly not the first person to ask those questions. In July this year, the Leader of the Opposition was interviewed on "The Financial World Tonight" and he was asked, for example, whether British Telecom and British Gas would pay the new tax. He said:

"we are not going to start specifying particular sums of money from particular utilities."

That did not get us very far, so the interviewer tried again:

"Is it all of the utilities that would come under a windfall tax?"

The Labour leader replied:

"Well, as I say, Gordon has said that we are not going to start specifying at this point in time that there are particular utilities who are going to pay particular sums of money or whatever".

The interviewer was singularly unimpressed, and tried a third time, by asking:

"Why won't you give them that detail?"

The right hon. Gentleman replied:

"Well, with all due respect, we are giving that detail. I mean, we have simply said that in relation to specific utility companies we're not going to say specifically how much money companies are going to pay . . . at this moment".

That from the party which claims it is fit to govern the country. The Opposition have had four years to plan their policy and to show they know what they are talking about, and still there are no answers to the basic questions.

It is no surprise that concern about and criticism of the windfall tax has percolated through to the upper reaches of the Labour party. Alert as ever, the deputy leader of the Labour party has got wind of it first, so he has come up with a wheeze. We are told by the *Financial Times* that he has held a series of meetings with the utilities executives to discuss their involvement in local job creation and regeneration projects, funded by the tax on their excess profits. One might say that that is a worthy vision.

Off the right hon. Gentleman goes to the shadow Chancellor to set out his proposals. He says, "Look, shadow Chancellor, we've got a bit of a dog's breakfast here, left over from the old heady days when you and I were still recovering from peddling the myth that Neil and Roy were the dream ticket. Well, we've all come a long way since that, and I suggest that we hypothecate"—I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman would have used that word—"and use some of the windfall revenue for worthy schemes."

The shadow Chancellor was, to put it bluntly, unamused. In fact, he took off into outer orbit. He has already spent the money about 35 times over, but there was his right hon. Friend threatening to give the whole bloomin' lot away before he even gets his hands on it.

We should at least give the deputy leader of the Labour party his due. He cannot answer any of the questions, but, my word, he can certainly spot a question coming his way when he has had four years to think about it.

I must tell the Opposition that they cannot go on running from the questions. They must set out the basic principles on which the tax would be based. Tell us which companies would be affected and what criteria would be used. Tell us how big the bill will be for pensioners, customers and shareholders. Is it £5 billion, £6 billion, £7 billion or £10 billion? But then, on second thoughts, why bother? There will not be a windfall tax under the next Government, because the next Government will be a Conservative one.

4.57 pm

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"notes the plight of unemployed young people and the long-term unemployed and welcomes the Labour Party's initiatives to deal with these problems, to be financed by a windfall levy on the excess profits of the privatised utilities."

The Deputy Prime Minister sought to prove that consumers, shareholders and pensioners will suffer from Labour's windfall levy. That is the Government's case. We did not hear one word from him about the excess profits that have been made by the privatised utilities. There is no doubt that they have made such profits; even the regulators have recognised that and taken action. I thought that the right hon. Gentleman's speech was rather

tired. It contained an awful lot of tired questions and was not even helped by the humour in a couple of set questions with set answers.

The Deputy Prime Minister made much play of the question whether we are proposing a levy or a tax, and no doubt we will hear an awful lot more about that. Perhaps those words do not come easily to him.

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): What is the difference between them?

Mr. Prescott: That question was first asked by the first Government to levy a windfall tax, a Tory Government. The then Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

"I should require the banks to make a special fiscal contribution."—[*Official Report*, 10 March 1981; Vol. 1000, c. 773.]

What is the difference between a tax, a levy and a "special fiscal contribution"?

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prescott: I shall give way, in time. I always give way to fools such as the hon. Gentleman.

There has been an awful lot of rhetoric. We want to direct the attention of the House and the country to the fact that excess profits have been made. Let us not argue about the terms. There have been excess profits, and we intend to recover them, to put our people back to work. That is the difference between us and the Tories, and that is the point that we want to make.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick) quoted a letter from Yorkshire Electricity. He did not tell us about the letter from Yorkshire Water, but I shall leave that issue aside for now. The person at Yorkshire Electricity who wrote to the hon. Gentleman is one of the people who have benefited greatly from privatisation. Since privatisation, annual boardroom pay has increased by 565 per cent., and board members have £2.7 million in share options outstanding. I would write a letter to the hon. Gentleman if I thought that those privileges were under attack.

Sir Irvine Patnick: The right hon. Gentleman has a copy of that letter—unless he has not had time to read it.

Mr. Prescott: I have a copy of the letter. I want to deal with the arguments made by the Deputy Prime Minister about the effects of a windfall tax on consumer prices, investments and pensions—which is the Government's case—but I wanted, first, to make those remarks, to deal with the points made by the Deputy Prime Minister in his speech.

Despite the protestations of the Deputy Prime Minister, the privatised utilities were sold off cheaply, weakly regulated and allowed to make excess profits. Labour plans to raise a levy to help put the unemployed of Britain back to work, because we believe that that is social justice.

The British people have paid a high price for privatisation. As I said, the privatised utilities were sold off cheaply and regulated weakly. That was done deliberately, to allow the City to make a financial killing, which it did. Moreover, often the utilities were provided with financial sweeteners, such as the £14 billion of written-off debt and tax allowances that were given to the water companies alone. Water companies' profits have rocketed, water bills have increased by 83 per cent., boardroom pay has soared, and there have been record share options and other perks. The British public are picking up the bill for privatisation, and we think that that is wrong.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North–West): The right hon. Gentleman has told us that the windfall levy would be used to put people back to work. Will he tell the House whether Labour's plan would also include capital projects?

Mr. Prescott: I am sorry; I did not hear the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Richards: I asked whether the Labour party's plan would include capital projects. If so, perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will outline some of them for us.

Mr. Prescott: I shall deal with how we will use the money when I come to that part of my speech.

Mr. Shaw *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, who seems to think that I will not deal with it.

Mr. Shaw: Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the 3 million small business owners in this country and the 2 million other employers what is the Labour party definition of "excess profit?" Under Labour's definition, how many extra pounds in tax will small business people have to pay?

Mr. Prescott: That is a proper question, and I shall deal with it at the appropriate time. The hon. Gentleman has told us his opinion on such matters, but I remind him that he led the campaign to stop taxation of share options. Should the Chancellor, in his Budget—he will not tell us anything about it today—introduce a capital gains tax, people with share options will enjoy an even greater windfall than they have so far. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) would support that.

Today, we have seen the Deputy Prime Minister weeping crocodile tears for taxpayers, pensioners and consumers. This Government profess to have concern for the taxpayer, but are they not the Government who imposed 22 new taxes on the taxpayer? They profess to have concern for the pensioner, but are they not the Government who broke the link between pensions and earnings to fund tax cuts for the better-off? They also profess to have concern for the consumer, but are they not the same Government who slapped value added tax on to domestic fuel consumers, and penalised consumers—especially many pensioners—who cannot afford the heating bills imposed by the Government?

The Deputy Prime Minister must know that that value added tax increased fuel bills by £3 billion in three years. Are they not the same Government, and the same Deputy Prime Minister, who imposed the fossil fuel levy, which

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further increased fuel bills by £6 billion in the past five years—with more increases to come? How dare they talk about the burden on the public.

We have heard a great deal from the Deputy Prime Minister about shareholders and pension funds, of which he knows a great deal because of his business background. Was he thinking about shareholders when he encouraged firms to delay paying debts, which is the main cause of bankruptcy for small firms in enterprise Britain?

I recall when the Deputy Prime Minister sat on the Treasury Bench as a Tory Transport Minister, in 1970, when I was first elected as a Member of Parliament. I recall the debate that we had on the Mersey docks and harbour board, and I am sure that he, too, remembers it well. We were dealing with a statutory trust, which had statutory trustees. All the pensioners who invested in the trust thought that they had Government bonds, which were as safe as the Government. The Deputy Prime Minister, who was then a Minister, belonged to a Government who slashed the price of those bonds and the value of that trust's assets by one third. That action affected pensioners, and I protested about it to a Government who were supposedly concerned about pensioners and shareholders, but who imposed that tax on those pensioners and that trust fund.

I shall give the Deputy Prime Minister another example. He has been a Member of Parliament for a long time, and I cannot simply sit here and listen to him tell us how much he feels for shareholders and pensioners. Does he remember the nationalisation of the shipbuilding industry, when he was an Opposition transport spokesman, protesting about our formula for compensation? No doubt he will remember that. He said that the Labour Government's terms for compensation to shareholders were unfair. Day after day, he protested about those terms in the House. But after he became the Minister with responsibility for dealing with compensation claims, he rejected that stand and endorsed Labour's settlement for shareholders. It was simple hypocrisy.

The Deputy Prime Minister: The very reason why we could not restore the legitimate rights of the shareholders was that there had been so many transfers of ownership after nationalisation and before we came to power. It is precisely the same story here. There is absolutely no justice in penalising people who have bought shares at today's value because of mythical accusations of what happened yesterday.

Mr. Prescott: It sounds like another broken promise to me. The Conservatives promised one thing in opposition, and they delivered something else when they were in government. But the right hon. Gentleman should not take my word on it; shortly after the event, the editorial in *The Times*—I do not think that it is a Labour newspaper—judged that

"their treatment leaves a stain on this government, as on its predecessors, and on the reputation of those ministers (Mr. King, Mr. Heseltine) who made so much political noise and so many implicit promises at the time but who, when they enjoyed power, found it expedient to do nothing."

That was not the Labour party; it was the editorial in *The Times*.

Let us come more up to date—to Tuesday 7 March 1995. The right hon. Gentleman claims to be concerned about shareholders. What about the £4 billion wiped off the market value of electricity companies in one day because the regulator, appointed by the Government, got his sums wrong on the formula?

I was particularly surprised that the right hon. Gentleman dared to mention pension funds, when he belongs to a Government who spent most of their time raiding the pension funds of most of the industries that they privatised. Hon. Members do not have to take my word for that—the Government were condemned by the pensions ombudsman for it. He took the view that a £200 million surplus had been taken out of the National Bus Company pension fund. He arrived at the judgment that the removal of the surplus was a breach of trust. The Conservatives raided the pension funds, but they have the audacity to come here and talk about a windfall levy on pension funds.

A common thread runs through all those incidents—the Deputy Prime Minister was in the Government on each occasion, usually pretty close to the source of the crime, intervening before breakfast, intervening before dinner and intervening before tea. Never did he act in the interests of the consumer, the pensioner, the taxpayer or the public. That is hypocrisy.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): May I take the deputy leader of the Labour party away from his memoirs and bring him back to the windfall tax? Can he explain why he is not able to say whether the tax will apply to British Telecom?

Mr. Prescott: It is very interesting for the Chancellor to break his purdah and come to the Dispatch Box to ask that. I have some questions for him. Will he abolish capital gains tax? Will he reduce income tax?

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Clarke: I shall answer all questions about my Budget next Tuesday. Will it take the right hon. Gentleman until next Tuesday to answer my question? Why is his party unable to say whether the tax will apply to British Telecom? He has had four years to think of that detail, as he describes it.

Mr. Prescott: I shall give the same answer. We shall give all the details in the first Budget of a Labour Government.

Let me say something else in response. All the Deputy Prime Minister's questions about to whom the levy will apply, what the levy will be and how we will do it are proper questions, no doubt about it, but when the bankers' levy or—what was it?—fiscal contribution was announced in the Budget, Conservative Members were whipped through the Lobbies without being told any of those details. They were told that the details would be in the legislation when it came before the House. The measure did not apply to every bank, as the Chancellor knows. People were asking which bodies would pay and which would not. The then Chancellor replied, "We will tell you when we bring the Bill to Committee."

The Prime Minister said today that he wanted answers to those questions. He was a junior Whip in 1981, driving Conservative Members through the Lobbies with no

answers to those same questions. It is a bit much for the Chancellor to ask us that. I shall trade some secrets with him behind the Chair if he will tell me what he will do in his Budget. No doubt he will not tell us, but who knows?

Let us stay with the realities. The windfall levy is not an original idea, I confess. It is not even particularly a Labour idea. It is a Tory idea. They did it to the banks. In 1981, the Conservative Government applied a windfall tax on the clearing banks that had made excess profits. In his 1981 Budget speech, the then Chancellor Geoffrey Howe made his position clear:

"Indeed, bank profits in recent years have increased sharply, both absolutely and by contrast with the experiences of most other businesses . . .

Certainly the contrast with the sharply reduced profits of industrial companies is, if anything, more striking. In present difficult circumstances, I cannot avoid the conclusion that I should require the banks to make a special fiscal contribution."—[*Official Report*, 10 March 1981; Vol. 1000, c. 772-73.]

Just put the words "public utilities" in that quotation and the justification for the windfall levy has been made by the former Chancellor.

We have given four years' notice of the principle of the tax. The Conservatives gave no notice in their election manifesto. Unlike the Tories, we have given industry plenty of warning. Even the shareholders and the pension funds have known since 1992 of the possibility of the windfall tax and its implementation. They have no doubt taken it into account when judging their earnings.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prescott: No. I give way only to full-time Members.

The shadow Chancellor has made our point clearly. I do not know where the chairman of the Conservative party—the other half of the double act with the Deputy Prime Minister—is today, but on Monday he produced a document to try to whip up fear about the windfall levy. It was based on the remarkable assumption that the whole cost of the levy would be passed on to the customers. That was his assumption for the effects on jobs and prices; in other words, he assumed that there were no excess profits in the privatised utilities. I know of nobody who has come to that conclusion, except the chairman of propaganda, the right hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), if I can say that about him—sorry.

There is a mass of evidence to show that excess profits exist—not that evidence and facts have ever made much impression on the chairman of the Tory party. The evidence is clear for all to see. The excess profits fuelled the fat cat salaries and share options to which we have referred. Directors of electricity companies have received £5.5 million a year—an 800 per cent. increase since privatisation. Payments to water company directors have gone up from £1.3 million to £6.4 million a year—a 500 per cent. increase. The Deputy Prime Minister would be happy for the Chancellor to abolish capital gains tax in the Budget. I do not know whether the Chancellor has told him if he will do it. They have probably had their Budget chats. If capital gains tax is abolished, those directors will pocket a £30 million tax windfall by cashing in on their share options. That is wrong and we intend to look at that windfall.

We have heard an awful lot about share prices.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield) *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: I want to address some of the economic points, which are legitimate issues.

Northumbrian Water was sold for £157 million; a month later, its share value was £207 million—up by 30 per cent. The electricity company Seeboard was sold for £246 million; it is now worth £1.2 billion. Case after case shows that taxpayers were short-changed—indeed, I believe that they were robbed.

Hon. Members may say that the large sums of money that have been made go into investment, but the regulator has expressed concern about under-investment in those industries. Hon. Members should read the regulators' reports. The regulators have agreed price rises on the basis of false investment forecasts from the companies. The gas regulator said that British Gas had underspent by one third on its capital expenditure allowance. In other words, the companies were allowed to charge customers for capital expenditure that never took place. The water regulator found that not only did the water companies fail to honour investment promises, but they were given massive tax relief to encourage them to do so. Capital expenditure by the gas, electricity and water industries has fallen by nearly one fifth in real terms since 1995. Those are statements of the industry.

What about the tax take from those companies? I hear an awful lot said about that. Compared to the normal rate of corporation tax paid by other industrial companies, the privatised utilities have underpaid on tax, despite massive and obscene profits. Some water companies paid no corporation tax at all, while others paid less than 7 per cent—those figures compare with the typical 30 per cent. paid by industrial companies. Altogether, the energy and water companies alone have gained a tax windfall in this way of £4 billion since privatisation. [HON. MEMBERS: "Old Labour."] Is it "old Labour" to point out that it is wrong that excessive profits are being paid for by our people in jobs, prosperity and prices?

The takeover frenzy for companies—with firms from America and France queuing up to spend £12 billion on the electricity distribution companies alone—belies the Government's claim in the motion about inward investment. The chief executive of the American company bidding for Northern Electric said that he had taken account of Labour's plans for a windfall tax. Apparently, it is still profitable to invest in this country—even for those responsible for inward investment, as they have taken the effect of a windfall tax into account. The Deputy Prime Minister should listen to an investor who has not been put off by the tax.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): If the chief executive of the American firm has taken account of a windfall tax, does that not mean that he will be paying less for a national asset than he would without such a tax?

Mr. Prescott: The figures that I have given show that the firms are not paying a lot less, and they have certainly taken into account a windfall tax. The Deputy Prime Minister said that a windfall tax would deter inward investment, but apparently the Americans and French firms have taken into account what my right hon. Friend

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the shadow Chancellor has been saying for four years. There is every possibility that a Labour Government are around the corner, but those firms are still investing and buying into the utilities. They are putting their money where their mouth is, and we should listen to them.

There is plenty of evidence of excessive profits, but can the utilities still afford to pay the tax? I have heard quotations from various analysts—some of whom, including Goldman Sachs, have been mentioned by the Deputy Prime Minister. I refer him to the expert team from Warburg, a bank that has advised the Government on almost every one of their privatisations. Warburg has looked at the windfall tax and considered the various estimates, and makes it clear:

"The ability of most of the companies to cope with a Windfall Tax is once again demonstrated . . . a £5 billion overall levy is already broadly discounted."

That is the judgment of Warburg, and Goldman Sachs has also made assumptions on the matter, but we will not make a judgment until my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor has talked to the regulator and the industry.

Some of the opinions quoted by the Deputy Prime Minister show that companies have discounted the windfall tax. They have not flooded out of the country and their shares have not collapsed. This is the key—a one-off specialised payment will not affect the long-term trend of shares, profits and investment. I am referring to the opinions of investment houses—including Warburg—to which the Government have paid millions for their advice on privatisation.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have here Warburg's assessment of a windfall tax, and this is what it says: "unjust and arbitrary". It is right.

Mr. Prescott: Every tax is basically arbitrary. *[Interruption.]* That is a simple point, and I do not know why it is causing such consternation. As for "unjust", that is a judgment, and there are clearly differences between us about the justice of the tax. We will use those excessive profits to put people back to work—the Conservatives will put those profits in their own pockets. After a detailed study of pre-tax profits, debt, dividends and forecast share prices, Warburg concluded that the ability of most companies to cope with a windfall levy "is once again demonstrated".

I also call in aid the Institute of Directors, from which Labour receives little help or advice. However, an article in *The Guardian* quotes the IOD as saying:

"We acknowledge that some of the utilities do have spare cash at the moment, and that the economic impact of the tax might be insignificant".

I presume that the Deputy Prime Minister is a member of the Institute of Directors—it is right up his street. Is he a member?

The Deputy Prime Minister *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Prescott: No. Does he agree or disagree with the IOD's opinion?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have here a letter from the IOD with which I agree. The tax will be "hard to compute", is "not the best way" to raise revenue, and "customers will suffer". How many more bits of evidence do I have to produce? No one likes this tax.

Mr. Prescott: I do not doubt that a lot of people do not like tax. People in this country have every reason not to like tax as a result of the tax burden after 18 years of Conservative government.

The IOD acknowledged that there was spare cash in the utilities, but the Deputy Prime Minister said not a word about that in his speech. He did not say that the economic impact of the tax "might be insignificant", and his whole speech was about how significant and dire it was going to be for the utilities. It was a load of nonsense. The companies have the capacity to pay up without increasing prices or significantly affecting the long-term dividend and share values.

We plan to introduce a levy in the next Labour Government's first Budget. After that, we will receive representations from interested parties—by God, there are many in the Conservative party—and consult the regulators about the levy. First, it will be a one-off levy, and not an on-going tax like VAT on fuel. Secondly, the levy will be applied to privatised utilities that have gained excess profits. In principle, all privatised utilities will be considered as candidates for the levy without fear or favour. There will be no way out by lobbying or by avoidance schemes—or even by joining the team that the Deputy Prime Minister has reportedly set up. Thirdly, we will ensure that the levy is taken from excess profits, and not higher prices. That is what the regulators are there for, and they have made it clear that they will not allow the cost to be passed on to prices. Those regulators were appointed by the Government in previous legislation.

Fourthly, the proceeds will be put to a good use. What is, in our judgment, a "good use"? In 1981, the Government introduced a programme of fiscal contributions from banks. We have made it clear that the excess profits will be used to get people back to work. The Government took the view in 1981 that they were going to transfer the resources from the banks' excess profits into industry. I do not know where that money has gone and, at the moment, it does not matter. We are saying that we will direct those resources towards investment in our unemployed people.

The proceeds from the levy have been earmarked for two particular measures, and we promise that they will be put to no other purpose during the next Parliament. Our youth unemployment is almost double the level in Germany. Currently, some 265,000 young people have been unemployed for six months. Our pledge to every young person unemployed for more than six months is that we will offer him four options: a job with training, voluntary sector work with training, full-time study or the chance to join one of the environmental task forces. All those options have been spelt out in detail by the shadow Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

A quarter of a million young people will be offered new opportunities to gain jobs and skills and we will offer financial incentives to employers to take on the long-term unemployed. That is important for the whole country. The present situation, where one in five non-pensioner families have no wage earner in the household, cannot continue. It is a disgrace. We are seeing a two-nation Britain and a wasted generation of young people, and a Labour Government will set about the task of putting that right.

It seems that some utility companies have taken to lobbying to seek exemption from the levy. I have a better proposition to make to them, since the Deputy Prime Minister referred to reports in the papers about what they could do. The Government and a future Labour Government will appeal to all companies and industry to help people to get back to work, and that proposal is often made at the Dispatch Box by Ministers. We will say to companies, "Think of ideas and help us to train our people. Provide the people with jobs and we will help you with organisation and financial incentives." That is at the core of our policy to get 250,000 people back to work.

From their constituency experience, many hon. Members will remember that the gas, electricity, water and railway industries all used to have very good training centres that contributed not only to training for those industries but to training provision in their areas. They trained more people than they required, but one of the first consequences of privatisation was that all the training bodies were scrapped—*[Interruption.]* I suggest that Tory Members go and look at the situation. What happened was that accountants became members of the board and pointed out that training was no longer a statutory requirement because the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and the Government had scrapped all the regulations and the utilities no longer had an obligation to train people.

It is time that those big companies thought seriously about how they can help to train our people, provide jobs and rebuild regional economies, but that is not tied to the levy. The levy will be paid directly to the Chancellor. The Labour Government will want to work in partnership with industry to see how we can provide good-quality training and not the skivvy training under the youth training scheme that the Government have provided.

The Deputy Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has made an interesting point. He will raise a one-off windfall tax in one year to pay the cost of employing 250,000 young people. What will happen in the second year?

Mr. Prescott: Perhaps it has not dawned on the Deputy Prime Minister that when people are taken off the dole—which costs £9,000 per person, according to the Government's figures—in the long term, more money is saved by reducing other public expenditure. *[Interruption.]* No Labour Government have had to live with 3 million unemployed. Unemployment was less than 1 million in 1979. It costs £20 billion to keep 3 million people on the dole, and I wish that we had heard a little more from Conservatives about how to get our people back to work so that we do not waste money keeping them on the dole.

We need to use our resources to get people back to work to meet the community's needs. That is the intelligent way to deal with the matter and my right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has constantly made the point about how much it costs to maintain people on the dole. In our proposals for incentives for the long-term unemployed, we have stated how much will be used for the financial incentive to keep people back at work. *[Interruption.]* I would have thought that the hon. Member for Dover, as an accountant, would know about the changes in losses and profits that will occur if people go back to work instead of staying on the dole. The hon. Gentleman will have his own concerns about being out of work, because our proposals will return the Labour candidate in Dover to replace him as the Member of Parliament. *[Interruption.]* The people are listening, even if Tory Members are not.

The chief executive of United Utilities, Brian Staples, quoted in the magazine "Utility Week", said that his company had better prospects under a Labour Government than under a Conservative Government. That is what he said and he is right.

Mr. Atkins: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prescott: No. I have given way far more than the Deputy Prime Minister did.

The utilities would still have to pay the levy to the Treasury, but they could play a great part in local and regional regeneration to benefit our skills base and build our regional economies. In that way, they could play a key part in tackling the whole unemployment cycle.

Independent experts confirm that the levy can be raised from excess profits without passing on the cost to the customer. The windfall levy is fair, transparent and popular and we will put it to good use. The unemployed and the decent people in Britain cannot wait for us to give new hope to our young people and the long-term unemployed. It will not be long before we will get the chance to do it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Before I call any Member to speak, I wish to point out that many Members want to speak and the debate must end at 7 o'clock. I therefore ask that Members make their speeches as short as possible.

5.34 pm

Sir John Cope (Northavon): That was an irresponsible speech from the deputy leader of the Labour party, because it increased rather than decreased the uncertainty that surrounds the windfall tax. It shows that the Labour party is not fit or ready for the responsibility of government if it behaves like that with the taxation system.

I want to consider the precise terms of the amendment that the right hon. Gentleman moved. The amendment says that there would be

"a windfall levy on the excess profits of the privatised utilities."

"Windfall" is a slightly odd word to use in the context as windfall apples are those which fall prematurely from the tree because of high winds. As a result, they do not count in the production of apples from that tree. Windfall apples are often bruised and worth less than other apples, except to the urchins who climb over the wall and pick them up. So referring to a windfall tax is an inappropriate use of the word.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): As an urchin, perhaps I may help the right hon. Gentleman by suggesting that the windfall levy could be called a fiscal

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

contribution, which is the same language that his party used for the same tax a little over a decade ago. Would that help him out of his problem?

Sir John Cope: That is not the phrase used in the Labour party's amendment.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the legal definition of the word "windfall", which is something that accrues to a individual through no effort of his own?

Sir John Cope: I am always prepared to take legal advice from the hon. Lady as I know that she has legal training, but I am using the word in the ordinary way. A windfall benefits not the person who owns the tree, but the urchins who climb over the wall.

The more important definitions, rather than just the name of the tax, are those concerning "excess profits" and "privatised utilities". Those are the important words in the amendment and they are the nub of the debate. Those words summarise the questions that need to be answered and have not been answered after four years, as my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister pointed out earlier. The two main questions are how the tax will be calculated and which companies will pay it. Until we know that, we cannot work out what the effect will be on the companies, the consumers or anyone else.

On the question of how the tax will be calculated, the deputy leader of the Labour party said early in his speech that he would explain the definition of excess profits, but he never did. We have had profits taxes and excess profits taxes in the past.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Perhaps I can help the right hon. Gentleman, as I often did in the past when he was deputy Chief Whip. He will know that Scottish Power made a hostile bid for a water company in the south of England and has made equally hostile advances to Merseyside and North-Western electricity board. If Scottish Power is so rich that it can engage in such predatory activity, surely it has the money to pay the windfall tax.

Sir John Cope: I acknowledge the co-operation that the hon. Gentleman has shown in the past, but it is no good imposing a tax on a company because it has made a takeover bid. One has somehow to define excess profits so that the Government can say, "You will pay X per cent. of the profit that you have made."

Basically, there are two ways in which that might be done. The first would be to tax the operating profit. Sometimes the deputy Leader of the Opposition appeared to be looking towards the companies' operating profits, and spoke of their making excess profits in that sense. The other way would be to use the share values. The right hon. Gentleman spoke about the companies being sold off cheaply, and other parts of his speech suggested that the excess profits would be calculated on the basis of the way in which share prices had moved.

One thing is clear: whatever the definition is—whether it relates to operating profit or to share values at different points in time—the same definition must apply right across the companies on which the levy, tax or whatever one likes to call it, will fall. Apart from any other consideration, the Bill would be hybrid if that were not the case. A single definition must cover all the different companies to which the measure will apply.

We are not clear which companies will fall into the category, but if the right hon. Gentleman considers the possibilities, he will see that it is difficult to use a single definition in a fair way.

Mr. Tim Smith: Did my right hon. Friend see the table published in the *Financial Times* on 31 October, which showed that if the levy were based on total return until 1 January 1993, British Telecom would have to pay £1,500 million, whereas if it were based on total return until 1 January 1996, it would have to pay nothing? Is it not extremely important that we should be told not only what is meant by excess profits, but the date from which the levy would be calculated?

Sir John Cope: Yes, because without that detail we do not know. The sums are arbitrary.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North–East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir John Cope: I shall give way one last time, but I have already given way several times. Other people want to speak, too, and I must obey your instructions, Madam Deputy Speaker, by making my speech short.

Mr. Timms: Was the right hon. Gentleman not a Whip on the Finance Bill when the measure was passed in 1981?

Sir John Cope: I have been all sorts of things, including a Treasury Minister. If the hon. Gentleman is talking about the banks levy, he will remember that the so-called windfall tax, if he likes to use that phrase—I have already expressed some doubts about it—came about not as a result of any operation by the banks but because there had been exceptionally high interest rates for a period. The tax was levied only on income from cash deposit accounts, and the measure was precise and well arranged.

I was asking whether the Opposition intended to impose the tax on operating profits or on share values. It is extremely difficult to find a definition of excess operating profits. What is an excess profit? There are regulators assessing all the companies and making judgments all over the place. Somehow or other they must come up with a legal definition of "excess".

If the Opposition intend to use operating profits, they might just as well increase corporation tax on all companies in a certain class. Indeed, the old profits tax which existed many years ago when I first started to study accountancy had some special rules for nationalised industries and utilities—although those concerned special reliefs rather than a special levy. I suggest that that would be a much simpler way.

At other times, however, the deputy Leader of the Labour party spoke as though the levy would fall on changes in the share values. As my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister pointed out, the difficulty with that

idea is that the people who originally bought electricity shares in 1990, for example, are often no longer the shareholders.

In the case of SWEB, one of the companies which covers my area, none of the original shareholders is still there. The Southern Company, which bought SWEB, paid £9.65 each for the shares. The idea that shares are now worth more than that is difficult to measure, and may not be true. The other day when I asked the company, I was told that it would need to borrow money to pay the tax. That would hit its investment plans. Similar considerations apply in every case.

Although there was a rise in the share price of many of the companies after privatisation, that money is not within the companies, and never was. It rests with the shareholders, or rather with those who were shareholders at the time. Any levy imposed on the company itself will not get at the profit made by shareholders in the early stages. It never would have done, and never can do.

In almost all the companies, some existing shareholders show a loss on their investment. I looked at the share prices this morning, and different companies always have highs and lows. The high point for Anglian Water this year was 631p, but its shares stood at 567½p yesterday. Much the same could be said of the electricity companies. There are many shareholders whose shares show a loss at this point in time, although clearly they hope to show a profit in due course. The money never was in the companies, and certainly it is not there now, yet those people will be indirectly penalised. Those are some of the disadvantages of trying to raise the levy on the basis of changes in share values.

Another important set of questions has been asked, but not answered, today. On which companies will the levy fall? The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) largely followed the wording of the Opposition amendment, which says that the levy would be based on

"the excess profits of the privatised utilities".

But the Leader of the Opposition said to the Confederation of British Industry that the target would be the privatised monopoly utilities. That is a different phrase, and covers a different set of companies.

Mr. Tim Smith: Far fewer.

Sir John Cope: Yes, far fewer. Certainly many companies are mentioned in that context which are in no way monopolies. British Gas, for example, may be included, yet in my part of the country there is competition with British Gas, to say nothing of British Telecom and the rest. BT has faced competition right from the start, with Mercury and so on, and now there is even greater competition. BT operates in the big world market. It is not a privatised monopoly utility at all, and neither is British Gas. The British Airports Authority is not one either. I am not even sure whether BAA is a utility. The word "utility" is not very precise.

Mr. Allason: And British Airways?

Sir John Cope: I cannot see how one could say that that was a utility. It is certainly not a monopoly. The only word that fits is "privatised".

Mr. Tim Smith: And successful.

Sir John Cope: Of course—my hon. Friend is right.

As was pointed out in an earlier intervention, the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) has said that the Labour party has not ruled out any of the privatised companies. Those include British Aerospace and Rolls-Royce, which employs some of my constituents, as well as some of the right hon. Lady's. I cannot see how on earth the definition could be extended to cover those companies. They are obviously not utilities. Using the definition in the amendment rather than that used by the right hon. Member for Derby, South, Rolls-Royce and British Aerospace escape—but so far as I can see, so do British Telecom, BAA, British Airways and the others.

What about Bristol Water, which supplies water to many of my constituents? It has never been nationalised; it has always been a private water company—and there are others. When it is loosely stated that there will be a tax on all utilities—that is what the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East said—we must think about Bristol Water. Are such companies entitled to rely on the wording of the amendment, which refers to "privatised utilities"? Does the deputy leader of the Labour party's emphasis at the end of his speech on "privatised utilities" mean that Bristol Water is out of it? I hope that we shall hear definitely whether such water companies are out of all this, as they should be. They do not come under any of the definitions that the deputy Leader of the Opposition gave. We need much greater clarity about the companies that will be involved, should the levy ever come about, or we shall not be able to tell what will be its effects.

There is no doubt that the main effect will fall on consumers, whatever the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East says. He said that it would not fall directly on consumers because Labour would not allow prices to be adjusted. That means that it will hit the companies' investment—and failure to invest ultimately hits consumers just as much as putting prices up.

Many companies are investing huge amounts. SWEB is investing £60 million this year to improve the distribution system, its service to customers, and so on. Yet City analysts, doing their best to find out what all this means, tell it that it might have to pay between £20 million and £80 million, the spectrum is that broad, to meet the levy. SWEB and Midland Electricity, which also serves my constituents, give excellent service—a better and cheaper service than when they were nationalised.

It is difficult to make out from what the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East said today or from previous statements by leading Labour spokesmen, some of which are contradictory, whether the leaders of the Labour party know the answers to my questions and will not tell us or whether they do not know the answers because they not worked them out yet. It must be one or the other; either way, it is damaging. The basic questions remain: which companies will pay? How will the tax be levied? What effect will it have?

The mere announcement of the tax four years ago, and the constant repetition of it since, has inhibited investment. Companies, shareholders, regulators and consumers do not know where they stand. Whatever the answers are, and however it is set out, the tax would be very damaging—so I am glad that it will not happen because there will not be a Labour Government.

5.52 pm

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North–East): The right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) spent an incredible time and no little energy in discussing, almost with himself, definitions. That is the least of the problems. The principle of the tax is established with Labour, as it was formerly with the Conservative Government in which he was a Minister, when the windfall tax on the banks went through. Is he saying that every i was dotted and every t crossed before the 1979 general election, when the Conservatives were planning to be a Government? Did they know exactly how, on whom, and when the windfall tax would operate? That is nonsense and is no more true than it is today.

Labour's Front-Bench spokesmen already have in their grasp almost precisely the definition for which the right hon. Member for Northavon is searching. Rightly and properly, they will wait to take the appropriate advice when it becomes necessary. Let me remind Conservative Members that they paid out an absolute fortune to find out how to privatise the former nationalised industries. That was because they did not know how to do it. They had to take advice. How much did they spend on denationalising Railtrack—was it £6 million, £7 million or £8 million? Whatever it was, they had to take appropriate advice. Surely they do not believe that it is beyond our wit to do the same by a due process of consultation with industry, commerce and the City and with those who would be affected by a windfall tax, to determine a definition that will stand up to rigorous scrutiny and on which we can depend to bring in this much needed cash.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Purchase: I shall not give way. Time is too short and other hon. Members want to speak. I wish you to know that I will not be interrupted, Madam Deputy Speaker.

For Conservative Members to talk about the management of the economy is a disgrace. Was it not they who on black Wednesday blew £10 billion—we cannot be sure that we will ever know the proper total—on the hopeless cause of trying to defend the pound when the Chancellor of the Exchequer had already stated that he would pay any price to defend it? Was it not obvious that the City would take the bait and rip the Government apart? It was the Government who got into such a fix over the despicable poll tax that they had to add 2 per cent. to the general rate of VAT to recover their position. They have never been able to take it off.

I want to move directly to how the mess—and it is a mess, as I shall demonstrate—has come about. Regulation has troubled us since the beginning of the denationalisation programme. How do we regulate a monopoly? It is impossible to ape all the machinations and variations that typify a market in which there are any number of sellers and buyers. We do not always have that situation. In the case of what we call the pipes, the wires and the tracks, there is only one supplier. I will deal with TransCo in some detail later.

It is impossible, however bright the regulator may be, to create a market where none exists. That is the first lesson. We are discussing an inexact science. That has led to the difficulties that we daily have to deal with and is the basis of the assumptions that Labour's Front-Bench spokesmen make about the need to redress the wrongs that have been caused. It is a matter not only of taxation but of a new remit for the regulator and of a new approach to regulation that we will ultimately have to develop and implement in the interest of avoiding further excessive profits being made at the expense of the British taxpayer.

We must recognise that, however badly the regulators have regulated, personal squabbles aside—it has not been an enterprise covered in glory—the staff and resources of the regulators are too tiny compared to the resources available to the denationalised monopoly industries. Puny is how I would describe them. The regulators cannot cope. The Trade and Industry Select Committee's proceedings were mentioned earlier, so I feel at liberty to say that every witness to the Committee to date has said that the regulators' staff and resources do not and cannot match those available to British Gas or the electricity industry.

We are told that the Americans have mastered the art of regulation. If they have, where do American companies get the capital and revenue to buy up our utilities? It is because they have been making a bundle in the United States, despite the so-called tighter regulation there.

I have some Library figures that I got 12 months ago. They are not right up to date, but deal with the year 1994-95. I want hon. Members to know what the Library researchers were able to dig up from company annual reports. They found that, in that single year, the pre-tax profits of the denationalised utilities were £9.06 billion. Tax paid was £2.4 billion—27 per cent., instead of the full rate of corporation tax. Of course it is gross to net, we understand that, but that does not alter the fact that those figures represent an aggregate underpayment by the privatised utilities. We then find that dividends paid totalled £3.5 billion, which is 38.5 per cent. when expressed as a fraction of the £9 billion.

Those figures would be extraordinary by themselves, but we have to consider how they arose. The biggest contributor is the fact that, during the years of privatisation, no fewer than 146,776 people were sacked—dispensed with, finished—from those industries. That led to externalised costs for the rest of the community and the taxpayer of an average of £9,000 per person out of a job—for the utilities alone, every single one of the 21 million households in the United Kingdom bears a cost of around £63 per annum. How can the Conservative Government trumpet the great gains from privatisation when the truth is that it has been paid for in human misery and suffering and by every household in the United Kingdom?

The right hon. Member for Northavon asked about water companies and I shall give him some examples. I shall deal specifically not with his water company, but with the top three in terms of pre-tax profits. I start with Thames Water. That company's profits in 1994-95 were £303 million, but tax paid was 7 per cent. or £22 million.

Mr. Tim Smith: That was because of capital investment.

Mr. Purchase: It was not because of the company's capital investment.

Mr. Smith: There is a very simple explanation as to why the water companies paid below average corporation tax: it is because of their high level of capital investment.

Mr. Purchase: That is only part of the answer, as the hon. Gentleman well knows. In a short speech, we cannot

deal with these matters in the way that he wants and I will not get tied up by doing so. The headline figures are exceedingly important and give a proper flavour of the subject of this debate.

To return to my speech, the North West Water group's pre-tax profits were £284 million, but the company paid tax of just 5 per cent. Severn Trent's profits were £268 million, but only 11 per cent. was paid in tax. The area I represent is covered by Severn Trent and I have figures showing that, since privatisation, the company's profits have totalled £1.836 billion. Of course, there is overrewarding in the boardroom—directors' remuneration this year totals £1,249,000. Snouts in the trough would be a better description than overrewarding.

Competition has been mentioned, particularly in the south-west, which is the local area of the right hon. Member for Northavon. Competition has been introduced, but evidence to the Select Committee shows that the Gas Consumers Council has recorded a 90 per cent. increase in the number of complaints. That figure refers only to the unresolved complaints that have had to be dealt with by the council, not the whole range of complaints that have been made to the gas company.

How did we reach a position in which such enormous profits are made? One of the reasons was the terrible, tragic and crazy undervaluation of assets at the time of privatisation. In almost every instance—perhaps without exception—there was a significant undervaluation of the asset. Actually, one exception comes to mind—the nuclear industry. When it became perfectly clear that the industry could not be sold as a whole because money could not be made from it, the Government divided it up. They took the brand-new nuclear reactor—Sizewell B, which had cost £4 billion to construct and which had only recently been commissioned—and sold it for £2.9 billion. The rest of the nuclear liability was left in the public sector to be picked up by the taxpayer. That was a clear example of money being taken from the public purse to put in private pockets.

Finally, I want to address the question of TransCo, which is a natural monopoly because no one wants to dig into the ground to lay another set of gas pipes. The gas companies will all use the same gas pipes and the competition to which the right hon. Member for Northavon referred is between suppliers. What do the suppliers have to say about TransCo? To some extent, they agree with the regulator that prices are too high. When the regulator brought price capping into play, TransCo complained that 10,000 jobs would be lost. The truth was that it already had somewhere in the region of 9,000 job losses in the pipeline.

Then TransCo shares fell slightly in price and everyone's reaction was, "How terrible. The regulator is ruining the industry." The truth is that, of the 1.8 million shareholders, 1.1 million were small shareholders, having fewer than 500 shares. If the regulator's price capping in respect of TransCo is adhered to, those 1.1 million small shareholders will actually be better off losing £130 on the value of their shares because of the lower gas prices that they will have to pay. That says a lot.

I spoke earlier of the privatised industries externalising their costs through massive unemployment. If we add together the costs of unemployment arising from privatisation and the regulator's proposals in respect of TransCo, we find that the British people would be far better off if TransCo had remained nationalised. If the gas suppliers had competed properly to put their gas down the tubes, the nation would have been better off, we would have had the money to put into unemployment, and, generally speaking, people would have seen some value in return for the assets that were stolen from them by the Conservative Government.

6.7 pm

Sir Michael Grylls (North–West Surrey): If any Conservative Members had doubted the wisdom of having this debate, those doubts must have been swept away by now. Clearly, we have flushed out Labour in respect of the extraordinary windfall tax about which Opposition Members have been talking for the past four years. The resulting headline might be, "New Labour, old attitudes".

I listened carefully to the speech by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North–East (Mr. Purchase), but I hope that he will forgive me if, because of the shortness of the time available, I do not follow him down some of the paths he laid out. However, at the beginning of his speech he commented on the regulators and the way in which they had not got going as strongly as they should have, and I think that that is unfair.

Although America had previously had regulators for monopoly industries, the privatisation programme in Britain broke new ground. I am not trying to make a party point, but the country owes a huge debt to the regulators. Some have been better than others and there are many different opinions about their effectiveness, but the regulators have tried hard and I think that they have been successful in getting to grips with the problem of how to regulate—especially in respect of prices—monopoly or near-monopoly industries.

If one wanted any proof of that, it is that, by and large, in all our utilities—with the exception of water companies, which are in a special position—prices have decreased considerably. If a regulator's job is to protect the consumer, the regulators have done their job well. As the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North–East said, they could always press down prices a bit more, but I shall not go too far down that road.

What has emerged from the debate is Labour's old wish to interfere. Labour has lost the intellectual battle on nationalisation versus privatisation. It has been a bitter blow. In the 12 years or so since privatisation started, Labour Members have opposed every privatisation because they did not believe in it. In a way, that was reasonable, because they believed in nationalisation, but they have had to face the fact that the privatisations have been highly successful on almost any measure that one cares to produce, whether it be the consumer's interests, investment, or getting politicians out of those industries' hair. It has been a bitter pill for the Labour party to swallow.

So what happens? Labour finds a different route. Labour Members do not propose to renationalise the utilities, but they would like to interfere in them. It would be more intellectually honest for them to tell the House and the country, "Yes, we want to run those businesses. We think that it is wrong that they are run by professional managers. We should like to run those industries if we ever formed a Government. We think that we would run them better"—not many people would agree, but that is what they would say—"so we would nationalise those

[Sir Michael Grylls]

industries and take them over." That would be more honest than trying to interfere through the back door using windfall taxes and so on.

Labour Members also appear to have forgotten—I hope that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) will mention this—that the world has moved on since the early days of privatisation, and that companies based in other countries have invested in those businesses and bought the shares. Many of those utility companies are now owned by American or French companies.

Not so very long ago, we had a 13-year battle to get rid of a method of taxation in the United States that everyone agreed was wrong—corporate taxation by the unitary tax method. There was a huge fight, in which both sides of the House were agreed: an entirely non-partisan effort. In the end it was won, to the great advantage of Britain, because British companies in America had been damaged by what hon. Members on both sides of the House agreed was an unfair, unjust, damaging tax.

Now, in 1996, in Britain, we have the prospect—in the unlikely event that Labour forms a Government—of another tax which most commentators outside the Labour party believe to be very unfair. As I believe I was the person who recommended retaliatory action in Britain against a unitary tax, I could not complain if that unlikely event were to happen. I am sorry that we are obliged to go down the fairy-tale route of supposing that there might be a Labour Government but, in all fairness to the public, we should warn them of what might happen if that very unlikely event happens.

If that happens and Labour introduces that lovely windfall tax, we shall not be in a position to complain if the Americans reintroduce a unitary tax, saying, "You have done a bad thing to us so we shall do a bad thing to you." Those 13 years of hard work would be thrown away.

Mr. David Shaw: My hon. Friend will appreciate that we have not yet heard an answer from the Labour party on how "excess profits" are to be defined. Does he feel that all the overseas investors into this country will now say to themselves, "Excess profits will be taxed by any future Labour Government if there is one, so should we invest in the United Kingdom?" Is he not worried that all the small businesses for which he has fought hard over the years now know that their profits are at risk because they might be defined by a future Labour Government as excess profits and obscene profits? Has not Labour today frightened 5 million business people in this country?

Sir Michael Grylls: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, which will be taken on board very widely by people, because the notion of "excess profits" is entirely subjective.

Let us suppose that one of the excellent small businesses that has been encouraged and helped to start by the benign regime of 17 years of Conservative government—low tax and all that stuff—has got going. Let us suppose that the firm is situated in Dover—an excellent place to be because it has an excellent Member of Parliament—and the firm invents a tremendous new product with fantastic scope and starts making a lot of money. The managers might say, "My goodness. There might be a Labour Government, and they might judge that our profit was obscene—whatever 'obscene' means." It is an extraordinary route to take.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have been told—I am sure that you will have heard it as well—that Labour has changed, that it now believes in all the things that the Conservatives believe in. I believe that there has been a change this afternoon. Labour Members were going one way; they have suddenly returned to a crossroads and are going off to the left again. They are saying, "We do not approve of profits" or "We do not approve of obscene profits"—but let us have a definition. They are saying that "profits" is a dirty word.

Mr. Purchase: You approve of obscene profits.

Sir Michael Grylls: The fact remains that the higher the profits, the bigger the corporation tax take, so there is more money for all the things that we all care about, such as education, and all the social services which always need more money. Taxation cannot be raised if there are no profits.

This is very boring stuff, I know. *[Interruption.]* Well, it is. We thought that Labour had left all that behind, but it has not. The great advantage of having held this debate is that we can warn people what Labour is really all about.

There is no excuse for a windfall tax on the privatised utility industries. The Opposition must know that there is no comparison with the one-off tax that was imposed on the banks, because they had inflated profits for an external reason—interest rates. Profits have been earned by the privatised utility industries because they have been well managed. They have made themselves efficient and made good profits by their own—internal—diligence. I use the word "good", not "obscene". That is different from the case of the banks. The banks did not argue with the tax. They had a one-off increase in their profits because of the very high interest rates, not as a result of their actions.

What will companies do if that unlikely event happens? We have been told that the regulators would not allow them to increase prices. I am not sure whether that will mean another piece of legislation to instruct the regulators not to allow the companies to pass the tax on in prices, but let us assume that Labour sits on the regulators and they say that the companies cannot pass on the tax in higher prices. What do the companies do then? Cut investment?

Mr. David Shaw: Cut jobs.

Sir Michael Grylls: Or cut jobs? The accountants' report on the regional electricity companies—*[Interruption.]* The Opposition should listen to this; I am just about to conclude. The report says that, in the regional electricity companies, it is thought that they would have to cut about 6,000 jobs. The deputy leader of the Labour party said that all that money would go into job creation. It will not. The tax will destroy jobs.

This is a job destruction tax. I do not like soundbites, but that one should go out across the country. The job cannot be done by the regulators, according to Labour; so the price will be paid either in investment or in a loss of jobs—probably both.

Today we have flushed out Labour on this subject, and the country should be duly warned. It is not just a question of a few remote companies suffering from the tax. The fact is that the improvements in these important utilities—water, electricity, gas, telecommunications—of the past few years would all be endangered. Investment would slump and there would be job cuts.

I believe that today the House has done a good job by drawing the attention of the country to what Labour's plans would mean. I hope that the electorate will see that this is a thoroughly dangerous and irresponsible tax, which shows up the old Adam in the Labour party.

6.20 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): It is rather strange that we are having this debate at all this afternoon. Not untypically, it was led off by the Deputy Prime Minister, who rushed into the House in his usual fashion, launched his broadside, and then disappeared—doubtless to fight more fires burning throughout the Government, or possibly to deal with the fallout from the bombshell that the Government dropped somewhat imprecisely yesterday.

My earlier intervention revealed that the Government are using Government time to attack policies that they say will never be implemented—because there will be no change of Government—and using civil servants to cost Opposition programmes which they do not expect ever to be implemented, so there is no one left with any time to run the Government. But even that does not matter, because they will not be running the Government for much longer. In view of the foregoing, I suggest that the sooner we have the election, the better. Four months of this behaviour will not be good for the country.

A windfall tax is not the right approach, although it is perfectly legitimate for the Labour party to cost one of its own programmes. The Labour party needs to answer some serious questions about the idea, and soon. The Opposition cannot deny that there is a great deal of uncertainty surrounding who the tax will affect and how. I understand why they are not giving details about the who, the why and the how much; still, the uncertainty persists.

I could not help noticing earlier, sitting where I do, that the more uncertainty about the level of the tax and the number of companies it would affect, the more cheerful the Labour Members who sit below the Gangway in front of me became. They have all left now, but their behaviour suggested that the tax certainly appeals to old Labour—

Mr. Purchase: Are you including me?

Mr. Bruce: I am not being personal—hon. Members can call themselves what they like.

A point of principle is also at stake. This is retrospective taxation, and I believe that to be wrong. Moreover, if there have been excess profits, and if consumers have been ripped off, it is the very people from whom the profits have been made who should get the benefits of any rebate: in other words, the consumers.

It is impossible to raise billions of pounds from the privatised utilities without hurting millions of people. It is all very well to say that the regulators will hold down prices. If they do, something else will have to give—either the dividend, which will not concern Labour Members below the Gangway, or investment, which should concern us all, or the chance of a great deal more energy efficiency and the alleviation of fuel poverty by reducing fuel bills. The energy utilities could and should be involved in that.

We should also bear it in mind that there are 5 million shareholders who could be affected by such a tax; plus 17 million members of pension funds. It is just not honest, therefore, to suggest that this is a victimless tax which can be imposed without hurting anyone. That does not make it intellectually dishonest; the Labour party is entitled to its argument, which is that the windfall tax is a way of raising money. It is, but it is naive to suggest that no one will be affected by it.

The Deputy Prime Minister made one telling intervention in the speech by the deputy leader of the Labour party, who made an otherwise good and rumbustious contribution, which I thoroughly enjoyed. With his background, he clearly believes in these arguments with a great deal of conviction, but he did not convincingly answer the question about what will happen in year two after a one-off windfall tax.

There are some doubts in the Labour party as to where all this might lead. David Wighton, writing in today's *Financial Times*, has produced an article with the headline "Windfall's Big Chill". It says:

"Labour says it was told by its lawyers that, while there should be no fundamental legal problems with the proposed tax, it must take great care not to discriminate against particular companies."

That would mean facing litigation, which in turn could result in a delay that could prejudice Labour's spending commitments.

The article also points out:

"However, the US energy groups which have committed almost £6 billion"—

perfectly legitimately and legally—

"to buying UK regional electricity companies . . . could face a tax bill of more than £500 million and could argue they did not benefit from the earlier windfall."

Mr. Wighton also states that the water regulator has suggested that a tax on the water utilities could lead to a rise in prices. The giveaway line comes in the last sentence of the article:

"But Labour insiders insist they will resist all attempts to undermine the tax, simply because it would jeopardise the party's only promise on extra public spending."

Therein lies the problem. Yesterday the Labour party responded to the Government's challenge—concerning the 89 promises that would cost £30 billion—by sending every available Labour spokesman to every studio in the country to say that it was all absolutely untrue: Labour has no spending commitments of any kind. There is no difference between the Labour party's programme and the Government's current programme, they claimed. That does make one wonder why anyone should bother to vote for a party that will make no difference.

The problem remains that a windfall tax can yield revenue for one year, but it will not pay for a programme for a whole Parliament. That leaves the Labour party somewhat exposed. It is why I conclude by saying that Opposition and Conservative Members alike might be well advised to read the Liberal Democrats' alternative Budget, published today—

Mr. Purchase: It is fantasy.

Mr. Bruce: Not so. It is in fact a highly focused, costed programme, leading to a fully costed manifesto. Front

[Mr. Bruce]

Benchers of the two old parties are attempting to persuade the British people that gravity can be defied—that it is possible to reduce inflation and taxation and increase public spending. The sums of course do not add up; they would require rates of growth without inflation which no Government, Labour or Conservative, have every achieved.

If greater investment is needed in education, as we believe it is, it has to be paid for from honest sources of taxation which can be identified and which people can understand: such as a penny on the standard rate of income tax. A windfall tax would not deliver a credible programme or finance a Government for a full term. It would create so many confusions and uncertainties and hurt so many people that I believe the Labour party will live to regret it.

6.29 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): The country needs answers. We have not heard any answers from the Labour party today. We have not heard how excess profits or obscene profits are to be defined, but Labour tells us that people out there are earning them. There are 5 million business owners in Britain, who will be frightened stiff by today's debate. Labour will tax entrepreneurs, those with initiative and those who create jobs.

How on earth do Labour Members expect a windfall tax to create jobs? They say that they will create new training schemes, but when has a tax created jobs through new training schemes? Where in the solar system has there been a tax that created new, permanent jobs, especially in the private sector?

Taxes do not build profits. Taxes do not build products or provide services. Taxes do not create businesses. In my business career, I have been involved in 2,000 jobs being sustained or created. I have never created or sustained any of those jobs through taxation. Jobs are created by investing the profits of a business, not through taxation.

I regret that time does not permit me to debate the matter fully. Labour must provide many answers. I challenge the Opposition spokesman to define "excess profits" to the House.

6.30 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): I do not know about the rest of the solar system, but I believe that the Government's own training programme, such as it is, is funded out of taxation. Like almost everything else that the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) has ever said in the Chamber, his assertion is wide of the mark.

I am glad that we have had this debate, and that the Government have chosen to debate our policies in their time. For a party that keeps telling itself that there is no prospect of a change of Government, the Tories seem to be rather concerned about it.

The hon. Member for North-West Surrey (Sir M. Grylls) said about half a dozen times that he was sure there would be no change of Government, but just in case there was, he should raise various matters. Conservative Members protest too much. They know full well that people have had enough of them. In their desperation they know that their only chance now is to throw mud at us and hope that some of it sticks.

For the second time in one week, a Tory bombshell has blown up in their own hands. Yesterday they attempted to discredit us by making wild allegations about pledges that have never been made. Each one of the 89 was refuted quickly and shown to be nonsense.

Today we were told to expect great things from the Deputy Prime Minister, but that was yet another damp squib. He failed to rise to the occasion. I read in the *Financial Times* today that there is a new Tory campaign against the windfall tax which is to be led in part by the Deputy Prime Minister. Anyone who was thinking of joining and paying good money—good money, no doubt, from the profits of the privatised utilities—for that political campaign will have listened to what the Tories said and decided that they had better save their money. Whatever else happens, the Tory party will not be able to do much for them.

It is interesting that the Tories are setting up a campaign against the Labour party. Many people in the boardrooms and privatised utilities will think long and hard about joining a Conservative party political campaign to campaign against anything in the coming general election. Most of them will have enough sense to stay out of it and to leave the Tory party to flounder in its own desperation.

Despite the fact that the Government tell us that there is not enough parliamentary time to legislate on paedophiles or knife control, or for building societies legislation, or even to discuss Europe—one of the most crucial matters facing this Parliament and the next—they find time to discuss our policies in Government time. What an indictment of a Government who have had their day. After 18 years they are so desperate to cling to power that they spend Government time debating the Labour party's policies.

We welcome that opportunity, not just because it allows us to restate the value of the windfall tax, but because it draws attention to another problem facing the Government. The reason why they are not discussing Europe today is that they do not want to reveal the depth of the rift between the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Euro-sceptics who make up an increasing proportion of the Conservative party.

It is a measure of the Government's desperation that they have chosen to side with the few who sit in the boardrooms of the privatised utilities against the many who have had to pay the 22 tax increases imposed by the Government, despite the fact that at the last election the Tories promised that they would not increase tax or national insurance and that they would not put VAT on gas and electricity. They did all that, yet they have the gall to attack us for our policies.

In the motion, the Tories have the temerity to refer to the "injustices" of our proposal. What do they know about injustice? What about the injustice of the one in five households in Britain where there is no one in work? Our proposal for a windfall tax is designed to fund a programme that will help young people and the long-term unemployed to get back to work. That is justice and, we believe, it makes good economic and social sense. That is why the tax is fully justified.

When we listen to the questions raised by Conservative Members during the debate, we recognise that the Tories are increasingly the political arm of the privatised utilities. It is a seamless garment, which we have seen today. We see it in the *Financial Times* article referring to a Tory

Minister, a Tory Lord, a Tory media adviser, a privatised utility and a Tory campaign. Most people believe that any Government who embark on such behaviour have had their day, and the sooner they are out of office, the better for everyone.

Perhaps this is the first time that we have had a sponsored debate in this, the mother of Parliaments. Perhaps, like the weather forecast, the next debate will be sponsored by PowerGen. That is what the Government have reduced us to.

Unlike the Tories, we say what we intend to do and how we propose to fund it. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), the deputy leader of the Labour party, made clear in his excellent speech, we will tell the people of Britain what we intend to do. We have said for four years that we intend to impose a windfall levy on the privatised utilities.

The Tories said nothing about their windfall tax on the banks in 1981—not a word.

Mr. Richards: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: In a moment. The tax was sprung on the banks on the day that the then Chancellor introduced the measure. He could not say which banks or how it would work. Conservative Members say that the tax had to be imposed because the banks had made profits through no fault of their own. They should read the report of the Committee stage of that Bill on 12 May 1981, when the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, now one of the European Commissioners, said that the fiscal requirement was necessary to achieve the public sector borrowing requirement. Is not that surprising? Does not history repeat itself? The Government were in deep debt in 1981 and they are in deep debt in 1996. After 18 years, it is the same story: the Tories put up taxes to pay for the debts that they have run up, because of the way in which they conduct the economy.

Mr. Richards: The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) referred several times to "excessive profits". Will the hon. Gentleman define that term for the benefit of hon. Members?

Mr. Darling: I am exceedingly glad that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman, as he brings me neatly to the next part of my speech. The entire Tory thesis is that there have been no excessive profits. That is what they have all said, time and again. However, no one outside the Tory party holds that view. Industry knows that excessive profits have been made. Analysts have made that point. SBC Warburg, which has no connection with the Labour party, said:

"The ability of most companies to cope with the windfall tax is once again demonstrated."

Every time there has been a takeover, commentators and analysts believe that the case has been made. I quote from *The Daily Telegraph*, which is also not exactly a Labour publication. It said:

"Each time an electricity company is taken over, Labour's proposals for a Windfall Tax on utilities gains a little more respectability."

Analysts and the privatised utilities admit that there have been excessive profits. The regulators have also encountered that problem: the electricity regulator fixed a price review only to discover that Northern Electric had found an extra £500 million to defend itself against the Telstar takeover. There is much evidence of excessive profits.

Such profits do not derive from the endeavours of those who run the companies—in many cases, they are the same people who were on the company boards before privatisation. It is interesting that often their first priority—Cedric Brown is a good example—is not to improve investment or to secure the company's future but to increase their salaries and grant themselves share options. The Government never condemned such behaviour.

The Conservatives say that a windfall tax would adversely affect investment. Let us look at what has happened. The Office of Water Services claimed that it required investment of £36 billion for the 1990s. In fact, the water companies have invested only £13.6 billion since privatisation and their current annual investment of £2.2 billion means that they will not meet the regulator's target. The idea that investment will somehow be affected by a windfall tax does not bear close examination.

Mr. Tim Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman explain how excess profits will be defined? Perhaps I can help him: will it be based on the total return above the average for the FT share index since the date of flotation? If so, until what date?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman may recall that the Chancellor made the same point about an hour ago. When he was asked to reveal his plans for next Tuesday, he said that we would have to wait. Unlike the Conservatives, we have said that we intend to impose the windfall levy and we shall make our position absolutely clear when my right hon. Friend the Minister for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) presents his Budget. As the hon. Gentleman is so concerned about the matter, perhaps he will reflect on the following information. South West Water has said that it can afford the windfall tax. A top director is quoted in last Sunday's *The Observer* as saying:

"We will be able to grow our dividend by 8 per cent. above inflation, even with a windfall tax".

That is good news for the people of Exeter and Plymouth: we will be able to fund programmes to get the young unemployed back to work and their electricity company will be able to perform its functions perfectly well.

Any objective analysis of the privatised utilities will show that the tax is affordable. Conservative Members must face facts: that is the evidence from the market. If there are so many fears and so much uncertainty, why are overseas investors flocking to buy privatised utilities in this country? They know of the proposal—they must contemplate the possibility of a Labour Government in the next 12 months—and they are falling over themselves to buy the privatised utilities.

A large proportion of inward investment in this country comes from French and American companies which have bought privatised utilities. They do not come to this country because they are philanthropists—they do not simply fancy lighting up the midlands or providing water to the north-east of England. They are here because the companies are cash rich. An analyst told me last week that some companies have so much cash that they could afford to make purchases with their own cash. The figures show that that has nothing to do with efforts within those

[Mr. Darling]

companies: it has to do with the way in which the taxpayer was short-changed by the Tory party in the early 1990s.

If Conservative Members believe that we are wrong, they should have a word with their shop steward, the chairman of the 1992 Committee. Last year he made it abundantly clear that he thought that consumers had had enough—they had had a raw deal—and he did not object to a windfall tax on utilities. Most objective advisers—even some Government Members—know that the windfall levy makes sense. When my right hon. Friend the deputy leader of the Labour party asked the Deputy Prime Minister whether his Cabinet colleagues contemplated such a proposal, he failed to answer—never mind the Opposition not answering questions.

The evidence shows that the utilities can bear the tax. The Institute of Directors—which is no friend of the Labour party—acknowledged that

"the utilities do have spare funds at the moment, and that the economic impact of the tax might therefore be insignificant."

We must bear in mind not only the fact that the tax is justified but where the money will go. Persistently high levels of unemployment have made spending in this country difficult to control and have caused divisions in society.

Unlike the Conservatives, the Labour party believes that it is a duty of Government to give people an opportunity to succeed and to help themselves and their families. One of the best ways of achieving that is by helping people off benefit and into work. That is good socially and economically because people are in work, they earn a wage and they pay taxes—it is a virtuous cycle. We believe that the Government have a role to play in that area, which is why the windfall tax is justified.

On behalf of the Opposition, I profusely thank the Tories: they have done a great service to the people of this country by giving us the opportunity to justify the tax. The people know that they were short-changed by the Tory party when it sold off the utilities and by virtually every Government action since on tax and spending. They do not trust the Conservatives and they do not believe them. The people are looking for a change: they are looking to get back to work and for economic stability to allow this country to grow and be proud. They will get that under a Labour Government.

6.46 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Jack): The chances of that occurring are about as good as seeing pigs fly. I was struck when I looked at the front page of the *Financial Times* this morning and saw the headline, "Windfall tax: Labour clings to a bad idea". I have heard nothing in the debate that leads me to a different conclusion.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) reminds me of a contestant in the radio game where people must speak for a minute without deviating, hesitating or repeating themselves. The only repetition that he made was his repeated inability to answer any of the telling questions posed by my Back-Bench colleagues. He did not deviate from his unwillingness to tell the House and the country what the tax is about.

The hon. Gentleman asked why the debate was occurring in Government time. If he cares to pay attention, I shall tell him. The Government have a duty to warn the people of this country what the Labour party proposes. The problem is that the Labour party is so frightened by its policies that it has not thought out the tax thoroughly and it will not tell people the truth. In this debate, we can shine some light on what is happening in the economy.

The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) talked of excess profits, but he did not define them. Labour Members failed to define what a utility is, who will be affected by the tax, who will pay the tax and how it will be set. They are too frightened to tell the British people the truth about the windfall tax. They employed the subtle technique that operates along the lines of, "If we tell them about the means, perhaps that will justify the ends," and they talked a great deal about job creation.

The best antidote to a windfall tax is the Government's record. We have lowered unemployment by about 900,000 since its peak during the recession and we have the fastest growing major economy in western Europe. The Government can be proud of their job creation record. Some 210,000 people are now back in work.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Since when?

Mr. Jack: Since last year. *[Laughter.]* That is an illustration of what happens when the Government take difficult economic decisions. All Opposition Members can do is laugh. Wait until the British people judge us on our economic record, which, since the last election, has made them £700 a year better off in real terms. Those are the real ways in which to judge the benefit of our economic policies, which are lowering unemployment, particularly for the young people about whom we have heard so much.

The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East tried to suggest that one justification for the tax was that privatised companies have been privatised too cheaply. He clearly has not had time to read the National Audit Office report, which made it absolutely clear that it was content with the way in which the Government had conducted those sales, and I believe that Her Majesty's Government's record has emerged very creditably on this score. The fact that the value of those companies has gone up is a tribute to the fact that the Conservatives had the courage to let them go, to have the benefit of private enterprise and private management. The same companies have invested and grown.

The right hon. Gentleman should look at the facts. He is very fond of bashing water companies and wandering around in the sewage of this debate. Let him just have a look. Since 1991, water and sewerage companies have made £7.8 billion in profit. But they have invested £15.1 billion, and they plan to go on to 2005 and invest some £24 billion. None of that could have been achieved if they had remained in the nationalised sector.

We were given a tour of all our yesterdays. One of the yesterdays for which the right hon. Gentleman was responsible was cuts in public investment. Does he remember them? Does he remember the cuts in nurses' pay? Does he remember the queues at the hospitals? That was his yesterday. That was the legacy that he bequeathed to this country. It has taken the courage of the Conservative Government and privatisation to make up for that lost time. It is a record of which we can be proud. *[Interruption.]*

The right hon. Gentleman chastised us about the fact that we—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Hon. Members who wish to contribute from the Dispatch Box should try to intervene. Sedentary comments or yelling are not acceptable.

Mr. Prescott: I wonder whether the Minister can tell us what the level of unemployment was in the periods that he is talking about in the 1970s.

Mr. Jack *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The same applies to the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw).

Mr. Jack: In answer to the right hon. Gentleman, we now have more people in work than any other major European economy. That is testament to our economic strength.

The right hon. Gentleman chastised us over the question of our tax on the banks' interest. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister dealt with that point. The right hon. Gentleman is very fond of sedentary rhetoric, but he clearly did not read, in his tour of all our yesterdays, what the Institute for Fiscal Studies said of the tax in 1981. It said that it

"had the merit of being applied to a well defined set of firms and of being charged on a tax base that was coherently related to the reasons given for introducing the tax."

It was a tax on profits now, not several years later.

I heard somebody talk about retrospection. This is the biggest retrospective smash and grab raid of British industry that has been proposed. It goes against all the basic principles of what is a good tax.

Mr. Darling: The tax must have been retrospective. Indeed, the then Chief Secretary spent several pages in *Hansard* explaining why it was retrospective.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman knows that Chancellors, during any financial year, may make advance announcements of what they propose to enact in the next Finance Bill. The hon. Gentleman's proposal is to tax what he deems to be undefined levels of profit and gain in an undefined set of industries that happen to have been privatised many years ago. That, by any definition, is a retrospective tax.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), reminded us, quite rightly—

Mr. Darling: The Minister is desperate.

Mr. Jack: I certainly am not desperate. I have enough information to sink the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central time after time on this tax.

The hon. Member for Gordon reminded us that somebody would have to pay for this tax, and there are no free lunches when it comes to tax. There are no regulators who can simply shut the door to requests from companies to review their pricing position. Mr. Andrew Dilnot, director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, questioned whether a regulator was in a position to ensure that the windfall tax was not passed on to consumers. He said that the regulator could not change the pricing rules that he had previously set and that he could not control them in perpetuity. That means that when companies find the effect on their balance sheets, on their investment, on their pricing, they can come back to the regulator and ask for that to be taken into account.

The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East treated us to his interpretation of whether the companies could afford to pay the windfall tax. He mentioned the Warburg study. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister read out the words of the study, in which it said that windfall taxation was unjust and arbitrary. My right hon. Friend did not have time to point out that the same study made it very clear that it expected some companies to meet the tax simply by borrowing. I point out to the right hon. Gentleman that much scorn has been poured on the head of Mr. Chatwin of Yorkshire Electricity, but he made it clear that his company is not one that is awash with cash, and his company is now offering people the cheapest electricity in the country. His customers have had a 25 per cent. reduction in real terms. His company now pays double the amount of corporation tax. He said that the company would have to raise its borrowings to pay for this tax, and cut back its investment.

I come back to the central issue: why did we call this debate? *[Interruption.]* Like all laughing donkeys, right hon. and hon. Members on the Opposition Benches make one simple noise—the noise of embarrassed laughter, because we have flushed out their inability to answer fundamental questions about the windfall tax. I remind them of what the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) said on 16 November, when interviewed on television. She was probed about what type of enterprise would be subject to the tax. She said:

"We don't rule out any of the privatised companies"—

That is a pretty broad field. She then said that Labour would see whether

"a monopoly element would be part of the consideration".

What on earth does a "monopoly element" mean? It is either a monopoly or it is not. Increasingly, throughout the utilities, there is competition—in electricity and gas, and there is massive competition in telecommunications. Opposition Members cannot say what on earth that definition is. Even among themselves they cannot agree the strategy.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths), in replying to a debate on energy policy on 16 July this year, said that the utilities tax

"will last as long as salaries as long as telephone numbers are paid to directors in the boardroom."—[*Official Report*, 16 July 1996; Vol. 281, c. 1043.]

It is my contention that the hon. Gentleman understood the long-lasting effect of the tax. It is obvious.

I do not think that Opposition Members realise just how badly this tax is playing. In November, a headline in *The Independent* said:

"There is no fair way for Labour to levy this tax".

On 9 November, a headline in *The Guardian* said, "Britain's windfall, Labour's dilemma". Again in *The Independent* a headline reads:

"Labour gets itself in a pickle over utilities tax".

It is not playing well outside. This debate will have flushed out the inadequacies of the Opposition in answering those questions.

[Mr. Jack]

It is a discriminatory, arbitrary and essentially random tax, and it will never be consistently applied. It is retrospective. It attacks company dividends. It attacks pensioners, pension funds and employees. Above all, it attacks this country's record as a low-tax economy for business, which has provided economic growth and has brought falling unemployment. With our record on falling unemployment, there will never be a need for such a tax.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 212, Noes 254.

Division No. 17] **[7 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joseph
Austin–Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dewar, Donald
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hattersley, Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Miss Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretf'd)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'ld)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Greg Pope and
Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*

Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'ld)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Bates and
Mr. Richard Ottaway.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House deplores the dangers and injustices inherent in the concept of a windfall tax on the privatised utilities and condemns a tax that would hit consumers, shareholders and pensioners while damaging the credibility of the United Kingdom as a stable regime for inward investment.

DEREGULATION

Motion made, and Question proposed, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14A (Consideration of draft deregulation orders),

That the draft Deregulation (Bills of Exchange) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 28th October, be approved.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Wakefield Nurseries Campaign

7.13 pm

Mr. Jon Trickett (Hemsworth): I wish to present a petition on behalf of the Wakefield campaign against nursery vouchers, which opposes the introduction of such vouchers in the Wakefield metropolitan district. The scheme will clearly lead to a deterioration in the quality of nursery education in the area. The petition has been endorsed by 30,000 signatures.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons call an immediate halt to the introduction of the nursery voucher scheme in the Wakefield area.

To lie upon the Table.

Local Pharmacies

7.14 pm

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I have the pleasure of presenting a petition on behalf of some 13,000 residents of London, a substantial number of whom are residents of Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham. It draws to the House's attention the problems that will face local pharmacies if the Government go ahead with some of the changes that have been suggested by the Office of Fair Trading.

The petition

Declares that we the undersigned note that the Office of Fair Trading is considering the future of over the counter medicines and record our concern about the future viability of local pharmacies which are a much valued community asset. The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons takes no action which might jeopardise the future of our local chemists.

To lie upon the Table.

British Cycling Federation (Grants)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

7.15 pm

Mr. Jon Trickett (Hemsworth): I thank those in authority for allowing me to introduce the debate.

As a member of Otley cycling club, which is affiliated to the British Cycling Federation, I probably ought to declare that I am indirectly a member of the federation.

Watching any skilled athlete engage in any sport is an uplifting experience. For me—as a person who is involved in cycling and has raced cycles for many years—to watch a racing cyclist in harmony with his or her machine is to observe the grace and power of an athlete made effective by a superb bicycle design and the scientific skills of aerodynamic engineers and metallurgists. In recent years, the televisual media have developed the skills and technology to be able to present cycle road racing live to millions of people throughout the world.

Many of us may recall that, when colour television became the norm, snooker and billiards suddenly became accessible to huge audiences. Commercial sponsorship rapidly followed, bringing large sums of money into the sport from the private sector. While cycling has always been able to attract some sponsorship, it is only the advent of technology capable of showing it live on television and to mass audiences that has recently enabled large-scale sponsorship to develop the sport further, and internationally.

It is a striking fact that, whereas elsewhere the sport of cycling is extremely well developed, in the United Kingdom—in spite of British cycling excellence over the years—it has languished in recent times. There have been some signs of revival, associated with particular individuals such as Chris Boardman, Yvonne McGregor and Graeme Obree, as well as the development associated with the velodrome in Manchester, which I am sure we all welcome. Nevertheless, the long-term membership of the primary cycling organisations, such as the Cyclists Touring Club and the BCF, remains static, notwithstanding the massive increase in bicycle sales associated in particular with the mountain bike boom.

There has been much debate in cycling circles about that disappointing performance, and especially about the way in which the sport has been managed by the BCF. I also understand that eyebrows have been raised outside this country, at the highest levels in the cycling world—in the Union Cycliste Internationale, for instance—about the way in which the BCF has managed the sport in this country. That must be worrying, as the UCI is the most important body in cycling.

International companies take a pan-European view of marketing. When they choose to develop sponsorship of a particular sport, they want the commercial potentialities of that sport throughout their target market to be fully developed. They therefore take a dim view of the fact that the United Kingdom market in cycle racing, in particular, is and has been so undeveloped.

Mr. Hein Verbruggen, president of the UCI, has made it known that, while he would like to ensure that major world-ranked races and other events will continue to be held in Great Britain, he is frustrated by the management

of the BCF, which makes it increasingly unlikely that he will have an opportunity to present such events in the United Kingdom. On the Radio 5 programme "On the Line", he said:

"Great Britain is . . . a completely black spot in the international cycling market".

The programme, which was an excellent example of investigative journalism, conducted by the journalist Mr. Ian Bent, aired many concerns that are the subject of serious audit investigation at the BCF.

It has been suggested to me that at least one major international company, which brought millions of pounds into cycling and which originates within the English-speaking world, has left the sport, disappointed with the poor marketing of cycling, particularly in the UK. Worse still, Britain's multi-stage cycling tour, hitherto known as the Milk race, which again brought much private money into the sport, has ceased even to exist. In my eyes and in those of many of my colleagues whom I have met on bikes on and off the road over the years, the BCF board stands guilty of, at best, a lack of vision and a timorous failure to realise the full potential of this beautiful and undeveloped sport, despite the fact that it receives £500,000 a year of public money, in addition to the annual subscriptions of its private members.

From time to time, graver charges have been made about the manner in which BCF board members have managed the BCF's business affairs. In July, I tabled a question to the Minister responsible for sport revealing publicly, probably for the first time, that serious questions needed to be asked about the relationship between the BCF and private companies with close links with BCF board members. My questions were prompted by the turmoil in the BCF following the election of Mr. Tony Doyle, the former world cycling champion, as BCF president. He was subsequently removed in what can be described only as a coup by board members.

The new president had declared that he wanted to increase the transparency of the BCF board's operations, to make the board more accountable to the membership and to secure the further development of our sport in the UK. For whatever reason, after a short period, Mr. Doyle ceased to be president. A process was begun that may eventually conclude with litigation and substantial legal costs falling on the BCF. I understand that, in November last year and in March this year, Mr. Doyle raised with Mr. Derek Casey his concerns about the way in which the BCF board operated. As you probably know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Casey is chief executive of the Sports Council, a primary funder of the BCF.

A number of events appeared to take place subsequent to my questions, which appeared on the Order Paper in July. It appears that at least one of the companies that was supplying goods and services to the BCF and that was associated with a particular board member subsequently changed the terms of its contract.

I wrote to the BCF and to Mr. Doyle asking that they authorise representatives to meet to seek a settlement of their differences out of court, thereby avoiding expensive legal fees falling on the membership. Such a settlement has not yet been achieved.

Consequent on my questions, the Sports Council appears to have begun an internal audit of the BCF's affairs. I have a copy of that audit. The Sports Council should have acted earlier in relation to the matter, given the fact that it has custody of £500,000 of public funds, which it has continued to pay on a quarterly basis to the BCF, even though the Sports Council was aware of the seriousness of the allegations and the turmoil in the organisation.

The internal audit reveals a grave state of affairs in relation to the manner in which the BCF has been and is being managed. The audit reveals, first, concerns about the financial position of the BCF, British Cycling Promotions Ltd. and the velodrome, which is the jewel in the crown of British cycling. A substantial deficit in the current year is projected. Secondly, the audit reveals inadequately structured management accounts, with what is described as a major weakness in the accounts in relation to forecasting income and expenditure. Thirdly, the audit finds inadequate financial accountability and control.

Fourthly, the audit refers, worryingly, to actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest involving some board members—some companies are supplying goods and services to the BCF; the principals of those companies have been BCF board members for years. Fifthly, the audit reveals internal conflict in the board. Sixthly, it asserts that board members have become involved in handling operational matters to a detailed extent. Overall, the audit report concludes that the board

"is failing to operate properly and effectively as an Executive Body".

In my many years in public life, this is probably the most damning audit report that I have ever read. Moreover, the published balance sheet shows an artificially low rate of depreciation on fixed assets. I am informed that the provision for stock on the balance sheet allegedly contains many obsolete items that no longer have any inherent value. A falsely optimistic picture of the BCF's health has been described in the balance sheet.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you might think that, given the scale of public funding that I have described, the damning nature of the audit report, the allegations in the radio programme, questions in the House and the prolonged organisational turmoil in the BCF, the Sports Council might have acted sooner. If you were to come to that conclusion, I would share your view.

I am not happy either with the way in which the Sports Council delivered the results of the audit to BCF members. At the annual general meeting a few weeks ago, where it was known to the Sports Council that many of these matters would be debated and that the board was to be re-elected, the Sports Council's representatives provided copies of the damaging audit report in advance of the annual general meeting to board members, who were clearly culpable.

I understand that the acting BCF chairman of the meeting was aware of the contents of the report, yet chose not to reveal any of its details until the end of the day, after the board elections and after the debates on related matters. The chairman did not act with full transparency in ordering the agenda in that way. Given the extraordinary nature of the allegations and the fact that the people who had been accused by the audit report had read it in advance, the Sports Council's representatives had a duty, which they shirked, to bring the report to the attention of delegates before the election of the board and before the debates. The Sports Council failed lamentably in the matter.

[Mr. Jon Trickett]

Subsequent to the annual general meeting, there has been a further session of the BCF's new managing committee. I am surprised, to put it mildly, that the Sports Council did not ensure that it had a representative at the meeting to monitor the BCF's deliberations, with an eye to ensuring that the BCF, at last, complies with the Sports Council's recommendations. I have expressed my view privately to the chief executive of the Sports Council, Mr. Casey, but I remain dissatisfied with his reason for that failure.

I should have expected that the annual general meeting, which was conducted after a year of organisational turmoil, would be a model of propriety, but no. Three matters concern me. First, the chairman allowed board members who had not been re-elected to continue to exercise their votes after they had been removed from office, votes which they held ex officio by virtue only of the fact that they had been directors. Secondly, the governing board of the BCF was not elected according to its constitution; rather, an interim committee was established, which stands outside the BCF's constitution. Thirdly, there is currently no elected president or chairman of the BCF.

Those three matters put the current BCF outside its constitution. Clearly, that must throw considerable doubt on the authority of people who are now nominally in charge of the BCF to receive and spend public money. That matter must be addressed immediately, because the Sports Council is due to pay a further quarterly instalment of about £125,000 to the federation on 15 December. Lawyers share my doubts about the constitutional position of the BCF.

I have been reluctant to air many of these matters in public because of the danger of bringing a sport that I love, and in which I have participated for a long time, into further disrepute. I have felt it necessary to do so because those matters cannot be swept under the carpet any more. My confidence in the Sports Council as a giver of grants and a monitoring institution has been severely dented. Questions must now be asked about the accountability of the Sports Council to the public and Parliament, especially when its so-called annual report has not been published since 1993. It is a bizarre, almost Monty Pythonesque situation when an annual report does not appear yearly, notwithstanding the fact that the Sports Council is happy to spend £47.5 million of taxpayers' money every year. It does so without, apparently, giving an account of itself other than that provided in its published accounts every year.

I understand that a meeting will be held shortly between the Sports Council and the BCF. The Government, through the Minister responsible for sport, should intervene to ensure that the Sports Council secures the following objectives. First, the true, up-to-date financial position of the BCF should be established. Secondly, the BCF should be brought back into line with its constitution, which should also be updated so that the federation ceases to be an unincorporated association, which therefore has no legal existence. Thirdly, a professional chief executive with appropriate experience should be appointed to take on day-to-day management functions, to carry the sport forward. Finally, independent solicitors, approved by the Sports Council, should be brought in to make recommendations on how to resolve the current long-standing damaging dispute, with the objective of minimising further legal costs.

I am particularly troubled because, if the Sports Council has been dilatory in its dealings on cycling, especially when it is spending £500,000 every year on the sport, I fear that there may be other areas in which that same dilatoriness is apparent. Given that the Sports Council has failed to produce its annual report for the past three years, it is time that the Minister responsible for sport agreed to the request of my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) for a report of some kind, if not an annual report, to be published by the Sports Council forthwith. I seek a guarantee from the Minister that that report can be debated and questions asked so that the Sports Council is made answerable to the House.

I thank the House for the opportunity to raise these matters.

7.32 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Trickett) for allowing me to contribute briefly to the debate. May I say to the House from the Government side that I believe that, by raising certain matters, the hon. Gentleman has done a service not only to the House and to sport in general but to cycling in particular?

The hon. Gentleman is aware that in recent months I have taken an active interest in the British Cycling Federation, and the jewel in the crown of British cycling, the Manchester velodrome. It cost a great deal of money and is an absolutely superb facility. As the hon. Gentleman is well aware, however, sadly, it has been grotesquely under-used.

The hon. Gentleman's allegations about the administration of the sport by those on the board of the BCF are entirely accurate. I believe that those who have been administering it are guilty of maladministration, neglect and abuse of their position. As the hon. Gentleman has said, there is a flagrant conflict of interest in respect of the companies that are providing services and equipment to the federation and leading, long-serving members of its board.

That matter was drawn to my attention by one of my constituents, Mr. John Kennedy, who has recently taken an active, positive and constructive interest in cycling. He has sought to promote cycling in the United Kingdom and to utilise to a much greater extent that jewel in the crown, the Manchester cycling velodrome. As a result of meetings I had with Mr. Kennedy at his office and home in Macclesfield, I arranged a meeting with the Minister responsible for sport, who is to respond to the debate. The Minister gave generously of his time to me and to my constituent, and the officials present were seized of the problems that face the sport of cycling. Those problems have been articulated and promoted accurately and absolutely down the line by the hon. Member for Hemsworth. He has not sought to decorate or exaggerate those problems; he has expressed accurately the concerns felt by many in that sport.

My hon. Friend the Minister gave me certain undertakings that the concerns that had been expressed and the information that had been provided would be fully investigated. I await his response with great interest. I have no doubt that a large sum of British taxpayers'

money—£500,000—channelled, as the hon. Gentleman has said, through the Sports Council to the BCF over a number of years, has been misused, wasted and squandered. Some of the bills that piled up were totally unnecessary and resulted from a conflict of interest and total maladministration of the affairs of the BCF.

I seek an assurance from my hon. Friend the Minister that those who have been responsible for the maladministration, neglect and squandering and waste of public money will no longer be permitted to be part of the BCF and its board. I share the views expressed by the hon. Member for Hemsworth about the way in which the recent annual general meeting was handled. It would have been appropriate for the audit report on what has been happening in the BCF to be presented before the board elections to all those attending the AGM.

I am very interested in cycling. I want the expensive jewel in the crown, the Manchester velodrome, to be properly and fully used. I should like to see it fall down from over-use instead of deteriorating and running down from under-use as has happened recently. A number of competitions could have been held there.

The hon. Member for Hemsworth referred to the international cycling body. My constituent has had regular contact with its president, who has expressed to my constituent and to the hon. Gentleman his deep concern about what has happened and about the fact that that has prejudiced making the United Kingdom the location for major cycling events, especially international ones.

My constituent is interested in fostering the participation of young people who want to cycle. He wants a youth challenge international competition to be organised at the Manchester velodrome. I wish him success, and I shall give him every support and encouragement. When he has sought to work with existing members of the board, however, he has been frustrated from every angle and at every door and corner. That is not how senior representatives of the sport should operate. They should encourage people who are keen to provide sponsorship, administration, organisation and enthusiasm.

The hon. Member for Hemsworth has performed a great service for the sport by raising this issue in such a measured and constructive manner. I think that my comments may have gone a bit further than his. He spoke with great moderation, because of his involvement in the industry and his interest and concern for it.

I appreciate the time that the Minister responsible for sport gave me, and the concern that he and his officials clearly felt about the information that my constituents and I, and the hon. Member for Hemsworth, have presented to his Department over the past months. I hope that his reply to this debate will be helpful. If it is, the hon. Member for Hemsworth and I will have helped to guarantee a good and successful future for cycling in the United Kingdom.

7.40 pm

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I thank the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Trickett) for raising this important issue today, for the way in which he did it and for bringing to my attention some of his concerns about the sport of cycling, the operation of the British Cycling Federation, and the use of the Manchester velodrome. I know that he has a keen interest in cycling, and I take his concerns very seriously.

Those concerns were first drawn to my attention last July, when I met my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and one of his constituents. I pay tribute to the typically energetic way in which he has pursued this matter and to his powerful and well-argued speech in this debate. At the meeting, his constituent made serious allegations of financial impropriety against the British Cycling Federation. He also claimed that, due particularly to the federation's policy, the Manchester velodrome was being under-used.

Also in July, the hon. Member for Hemsworth—as he rightly reminded us—raised with my Department four issues about financial concerns and the federation's use of the Sports Council's grant in aid, and about the future of the Manchester velodrome.

As the House is aware, the Government provide support to individual governing bodies of sport through their sponsorship of the Sports Council, which is an independent body set up by royal charter. It is for the council, within an overall policy framework set by the Government, to dispense the resources at its disposal, according to its own detailed policies and priorities, to ensure that those are applied effectively and efficiently and to ensure that value for money is obtained from the public investment made.

Like other executive non-departmental public bodies, the Great Britain Sports Council, and particularly its chief executive, Mr. Derek Casey, is responsible for ensuring that all public funds in the council's charge are subject to financial propriety and regularity, and that they are applied only to the objects and powers of the Sports Council, as authorised by Parliament. In its use of public funds, the Sports Council must comply with the requirements of Government accounting and other standards of good administrative practice set by the Government.

The hon. Member for Hemsworth quite rightly raised the issue of reports. The Sports Council has not produced reports recently because of the restructuring that is currently under way. The Great Britain Sports Council is about to depart for ever, and the new English sports council and the new United Kingdom sports council will take its place. A new report will be published in January 1997. As he knows, however, annual accounts have already been laid before the House.

In meeting its responsibilities, and to ensure the proper accountability and propriety of the sums expended, the Sports Council awards grants to governing bodies and other sports organisations towards the cost of defined programmes that are relevant to the Sports Council's policy objectives. Conditions are attached to each grant, and may vary according to the nature of the activity supported. Among the standard conditions that apply is the need for the grant recipient to provide a concise—but detailed—annual report and forward plan covering each programme activity. The reports should focus on the extent to which the predetermined developmental and financial targets have been met, and form the basis of a formal annual review undertaken by officers of the Sports Council.

The Sports Council's liaison officers also regularly monitor the progress made by governing bodies in achieving the objectives set out in their forward plans, and have regular meetings with officials of the governing bodies to discuss progress, developments and other

[Mr. Iain Sproat]

matters that arise. Liaison officers also have the right to attend meetings of the committees of the governing body. No further payments are made when compliance with the conditions is not met and no satisfactory explanation is forthcoming, and the remainder of the grant on offer is withdrawn.

Mr. Trickett: At my meeting the other day with Mr. Casey, the chief executive of the Sports Council, he said that the reason why Mr. Dermott Collins, the cycling officer of the Sports Council, had not attended the most recent meeting of the BCF's governing committee was that he feared that the Sports Council would begin to act as shadow director of the BCF. Does the Minister agree that such a suggestion is bizarre, for several reasons? First, the Sports Council is providing half a million pounds. Secondly, the Minister himself has said that sports officers have a right to attend the meetings. Given the failure to monitor properly the organisation, would not it be appropriate for the Minister to speak to the chief executive of the Sports Council and to ensure that the grant is used properly by the BCF?

At the same meeting, Mr. Casey said that he would not pay the next grant, which is due on 15 December, unless changes are made. Is the Minister aware of any action being taken by the Sports Council to bring matters into order?

Mr. Sproat: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. They are serious matters, and I will draw to Mr. Casey's attention not only the comments made by the hon. Gentleman in his speech but those in his intervention. I will undertake to ensure that a proper reply is sent to the hon. Gentleman.

As I have advised the House and the hon. Member for Hemsworth on previous occasions, all sports governing bodies in receipt of Sports Council grants are also required to have their annual accounts audited and to supply a copy of those audited accounts to the Sports Council. Additionally, the Comptroller and Auditor General may conduct more detailed audits. The Sports Council also has the right to conduct more detailed audits, and the Sports Council's management audit programme includes a review of the operations of a sample of governing bodies in receipt of Sports Council grants. That applies to the British Cycling Federation.

As a result of the very serious allegations and concerns raised by hon. Members about the British Cycling Federation, I have asked the Sports Council to provide me with a full report on the situation. The Sports Council's internal auditors have now conducted an investigation into the affairs of the British Cycling Federation, and it has revealed that financial accountability and control are not as strong as they should be for an organisation with responsibility for spending public—or membership—funds.

The chief executive of the Sports Council has recently written to the board members of the British Cycling Federation, drawing their attention to these shortcomings and making recommendations to address those concerns. The recommendations include the employment of a qualified management accountant, whose immediate role would be to review the financial position of the federation, British Cycling Promotions Ltd. and Manchester Velodrome Ltd., with a view to making recommendations to remedy the weaknesses identified.

The Sports Council is, however, satisfied that despite the administrative difficulties experienced by the British Cycling Federation, the council's continued investment of £370,000 for the annual development programme to December 1996 represents value for money. The sport is working hard to establish the proper structures necessary to harness the considerable potential that exists and to promote itself more positively to participants, the media and sponsors. In recognition of this, the Sports Council announced in May this year that cycling, among 21 other sports, will be eligible to receive the enhanced service that it is to provide to those activities which have significant development potential and are of particular relevance to the new focus of the Sports Council: young people and the development of excellence.

At the competitive level, Britain already has riders such as Chris Boardman and Graeme Obree, who are among the best in the world. At grass roots level, the British Cycling Federation has begun to focus on attracting more young people into the sport, with a major recruitment initiative being developed. Funding is also providing additional coaching and training opportunities, made possible by the Manchester velodrome.

As I have already mentioned, the hon. Member for Hemsworth has previously raised questions with me about the way in which sports governing bodies, and the British Cycling Federation in particular, let contracts to suppliers of goods and services. I hope that the hon. Gentleman was reassured by the answers that I gave him on 24 July, which I have repeated to the House today, providing information about the practices of the Sports Council in controlling and monitoring the use of public funds.

I hope that I was similarly able to reassure the hon. Member for Hemsworth about his concerns for the future of the Manchester velodrome in the light of the threat of legal action between the federation and its former president, and about the protection of public funds in respect of any legal proceedings. The Manchester velodrome is operated by a separate legal entity—Manchester Velodrome Ltd. This company is a wholly owned subsidiary of the British Cycling Federation. The Sports Council has entered into a formal agreement with Manchester Velodrome Ltd. which requires the operational and accounting records of the company to be kept separate from the records of any other activities of the British Cycling Federation, its associated companies and any related organisations. Also, all transactions between these parties are to be on a full commercial basis. In addition, the Sports Council has formally advised the British Cycling Federation that the grant that it receives cannot be used to pay any legal expenses or costs associated with the legal proceedings between the federation and its former president.

I am sure that the British Cycling Federation will be taking a keen interest in tonight's debate, and I shall certainly be drawing the Sport Council's attention to what has been said in this place. I shall also be seeking the Sports Council's reassurance that any further grant in aid payments to the federation will be on the basis that the Sports Council is fully satisfied that the federation is taking appropriate action to implement the various recommendations made.

The recommendations set out in the Sports Council's letter to the British Cycling Federation were discussed at the federation's annual general meeting on 2 November. There are already signs that the British Cycling Federation is taking positive action to address the concerns. The federation has now formed a new management committee, comprising four members of the previous board and seven new members. The management committee has indicated that it will carry out a complete review of all the federation's activities. It has also indicated that a key priority is to reassure the Sports Council that the British Cycling Federation is now in the hands of a competent, experienced, committed, and democratically elected group of people who are determined to take a firm grip of the situation. The Sports Council is due to meet the new management committee shortly to take those matters further forward.

I am sure that the federation will now be keen to get its house in order and make a fresh start—the more so because of the vast sums of revenue support that the Government have now made available for sport through the changes in the national lottery directions. It is in the interest of all governing bodies to run their affairs efficiently and effectively and, in particular, to satisfy the Sports Council that they are not only committed to the development of their own sport, from grass roots through to elite level, but that they have the proper financial management systems and controls in place to handle the public funding that they receive.

The National Cycling Centre has taken time to establish itself and begin to fulfil its potential. The minor design faults have been, or are being, addressed. Attendances at events have steadily grown and the cycling track is now used by riders of every level, from elite sportsmen to local schools.

A measure of the status that the velodrome now has can be gauged from the recent world-class successes of Chris Boardman who, in winning the individual pursuit title at the world track championships in August, twice broke the world record that had been set in Atlanta a month earlier. He then went on to break the world one-hour record eight days later at the same venue.

I will expect the Sports Council to continue to monitor the position closely to ensure that proper accountability and control of public funds are maintained.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes to Eight o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 11 November 1996

HOME DEPARTMENT

Illegal Drug Use Statistics

Mr. Flynn: To ask Secretary of State for the Home Department what new proposals he has to improve the accuracy of illegal drug use statistics. [2466]

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 5 November 1996]:* Information on drug seizure and offenders, collected from police and customs, and statistics of drug addicts notified to the Home Office are published annually. The accuracy of drug seizure statistics is being continually improved by, for example, direct collection of figures from regional crime squads and automatic data interchange from police forces. Dug offender figures will also be collected by ADI via the court appearances system.

Additionally, we have developed a more accurate way of measuring the extent of drug misuse in the general population which involves taking a large representative sample of adults and asking them to report on their own drug misuse.

The Department of Health issued guidance to the national health service in July 1996 on managing regional drug misuse database services.

Probation Service

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Probation Service's budget *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the west midlands for (i) 1997 and (ii) 1998. [2172]

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* The national revenue grant provision for the Probation Service in 1997–98, and the budgets for individual services, will be announced after the Chancellor's Budget statement on 26 November.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the budget for the Probation Service *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the west midlands for each year since 1990; and if he will express the figures (i) in real terms and (ii) to show the percentage change on the previous year. [2167]

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* The information is shown in the table.

Probation Service Revenue Expenditure

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
National Provision							
(i) Real terms	£274.5 million	£276.7 million	£312.1 million	£318.7 million	£332.8 million	£321.9 million	£323.7 million
(ii) Per cent. change (year on year)	—	+0.8 per cent.	+12.8 per cent.	+2.1 per cent.	+4.4 per cent.	–3.3 per cent.	+0.6 per cent.
West Midlands Provision							
i. Real terms	£17.6 million	£19.5 million	£20.1 million	£20.5 million	£21.3 million	£20.6 million	£21.3 million
ii. Per cent. change (year on year)	—	+10.8 per cent.	+3.1 per cent.	+2.0 per cent.	+3.9 per cent.	–3.3 per cent.	+3.4 per cent.

1. Figures are in 100 per cent. expenditure terms (ie including the 20 per cent. local authority contribution).

2. Real-terms values are calculated using the gross domestic product deflator, with 1990–91 as the base year.

3. To permit comparison, figures for 1995–96 and 1996–97 exclude devolved funding to support probation service partnerships with the independent sector previously funded separately by the Home Office.

ENVIRONMENT

Lead (Guidance for Doctors)

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what specific improvements have been made to the operation of the appointed doctor system in relation to the dangers of working with lead; and if he will place the updated guidance for appointed doctors in the Library. [1443]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Health and Safety Executive has drawn up guidance for appointed doctors. The guidance is entitled "Guidance for Appointed Doctors" and was issued in July 1992. The guidance details the role and function of appointed doctors and provides guidance on their duties under specific statutory regulations. With respect to the control of lead at work regulations, guidance for appointed doctors in given on lead toxicity and poisoning, biological monitoring, medical surveillance, clinical considerations and employment of women of reproductive capacity.

A copy of the guidance has been placed in the Library.

Tracer Silt

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to extend the trials of tracer silt to the Solent and the shores of the Isle of Wight. [2595]

Mr. Clappison: My Department has not conducted trials of the type indicated. Tracer studies were conducted by Southern Water Services Ltd. as part of its investigations into the proposed long sea outfall for Sandown bay.

Sewerage

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what size of served population gives rise to a requirement for additional sewerage treatment before the discharge into the sea; and over what period such population figures are calculated. [2557]

Mr. Clappison: Under the urban waste water treatment directive, sewage discharges with a population equivalent greater than 10,000 normally receive secondary treatment before discharge to coastal waters, but if the discharge is into a high natural dispersion area and it can be demonstrated that the environment will not be adversely affected, primary treatment may be sufficient.

Population equivalent is a measure of organic biodegradable load. The size of discharge is calculated on the basis of the maximum average weekly load entering treatment plants during a year and excludes the effect of unusual weather conditions.

Sellafield

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will arrange for the publication of the full list of research undertaken by or on behalf of the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive in regard to its proposed rock characterisation laboratory and nuclear waste repository near Sellafield; and if he will place copies of the reports in the Library. [2648]

Mr. Clappison: UK Nirex Ltd. has no proposals to construct a radioactive waste repository near Sellafield, but has applied to build a rock characterisation facility in order to help assess the suitability of the site as a possible location for a repository.

The company publishes its research reports. These reports, which are extensive, are available on request from the company. I have asked the company to provide the Library with a list.

Maintenance Work

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current backlog of maintenance in the publicly owned housing stock. [2796]

Mr. Clappison: The 1991 English house condition survey collected information related to repairs. This indicated that at 1991 the amount needed to bring the stock up to a good state of repair was £3.6 billion. A more up-to-date estimate will be available next year from the 1996 EHCS.

Newcastle City Council

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the inspector's report into the unitary development plan of Newcastle city council to be published. [3081]

Sir Paul Beresford: The inspector's report on objections to the Newcastle unitary development plan is expected to be delivered to the council in early December this year. It will then be for the council to decide when to publish the report. I have asked the planning inspectorate's chief executive, Mr. Shepley, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Shepley to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 7 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for the Environment has asked me to reply to your question about the Inspector's report from the public inquiry into the Newcastle Unitary Development Plan.

The report is expected to be issued to the Council in early December. It will then be for the Council to decide when to publish it.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the advantages of increasing grants towards upgrading the energy saving standards of existing buildings; and if he will make a statement. [3192]

Mr. Clappison: Earlier this year, we published a consultation paper about our successful and well-regarded home energy efficiency scheme, which pays grants towards basic insulation of homes. Since 1991, this scheme has upgraded energy efficiency in almost 10 per cent. of the housing stock, and given average potential savings of around £40 annually to householders. Our proposals included making the scheme more responsive to the energy standards of individual homes by widening the range of energy efficiency measures available. We have taken account of the comments we received on our proposals, and hope to announce our plans for the scheme soon.

Specialised Dwellings

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the change in the number of specialised dwellings for chronically sick and disabled persons started and completed between 1979 and 1994. [1416]

Mr. Clappison: Estimates of housebuilding for chronically sick and disabled persons are shown in the publication "Housing and Construction Statistics". Figures for 1984 to 1994 are in table 6.7 of the annual edition; figures for 1979 to 1983 are in the annual edition for 1979 to 1989. Copies of these publications are in the Library.

Chlorofluorocarbons

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what progress has been made in ensuring that CFCs are not used in the air cooling systems of properties owned or occupied by the Government or Government agencies since October 1992; [3248]

(2) what progress has been made in phasing out the use of CFCs in the air cooling systems of properties owned or occupied by the Government or Government agencies. [3249]

Mr. Clappison: Government Departments have had green housekeeping strategies in place since 1992, which include restrictions on the purchase and use of CFCs in air cooling systems and other applications. There is no record covering the Government estate as a whole; Departments take responsibility for implementing and monitoring their own strategies. My Department's policy is to continue to ensure that no products containing CFCs

or other ozone-depleting substances are purchased, and appropriate advice has been issued to our property managers, suppliers and contractors. The Department is studying the use of ozone-friendly hydrocarbon refrigerants in smaller air conditioning units.

Radioactive Emissions

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to change regulations concerning emissions of radioactive *(a)* material and *(b)* waste. [3198]

Mr. Clappison: The Secretary of State has no plans to change regulations concerning emissions of radioactive material or waste. Discharges of radioactive substances are regulated by the Environment Agency under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 (as amended).

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what monitoring has been undertaken by his Department into emissions of technetium 99 from sites in the United Kingdom [3197]

Mr. Clappison: Monitoring levels of radioactivity in the environment is the responsibility of the nuclear operators; the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Environment Agency also carry out routine monitoring. The most recent MAFF monitoring report, "Radioactivity in Food and the Environment", is being published today by my right hon. and learned friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions his Department has had with *(a)* Directorate-General XI and *(b)* other departments of the European Commission regarding discharges of technetium 99 from Sellafield; and if he will make a statement. [3199]

Mr. Clappison: Officials in my Department have discussions with the European Commission from time to time on various matters relating to radioactivity. These discussions have encompassed consideration of discharges from Sellafield, including discharges of technetium-99.

The latest monitoring report, "Radioactivity in Food and the Environment", addressing levels of radioactivity in both the terrestrial and marine environment, is being published today by my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Discharges of radioactive wastes from sites including Sellafield are strictly regulated by the Environment Agency to ensure that such discharges pose no unacceptable risks to members of the public in the UK or elsewhere. The UK remains committed to meeting all of its international obligations.

Environmental Appraisals

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when an environmental appraisal was produced using the guidance contained in his Department's guide "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" for the Local Government and Rating Bill; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [3308]

Mr. Clappison: The Local Government and Rating Bill takes forward commitments from the rural White Papers published in 1995 and 1996. Environmental considerations were a fundamental part of the preparation of the White Papers and each included specific sections on the importance of the rural environment.

As regards the Bill's provisions, the business rate relief scheme will promote the viability of village shops and other rural businesses which should help to encourage people to use their local facilities and enable them to travel shorter distances to shop. The community transport provisions should help to reduce dependence on use of the car by assisting the development of alternative means of meeting rural transport needs. The other provisions within the Bill have little or no environmental impact.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what regulations his Department proposes to repeal by the end of 1996; if he proposes to conduct a compliance cost assessment on each regulation repealed; and what is the estimated cost of undertaking a compliance cost assessment to determine the advantages or disadvantages of such a repeal. [3201]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department currently proposes to revoke the following regulations by the end of 1996:

The Flax and Tow Spinning and Weaving Regulations 1906

The Hemp Spinning and Weaving Regulations 1907

The Cotton Cloth Factories Regulations 1929

The Kiers Regulations 1938

The Jute (Safety, Health and Welfare) Regulations 1948

The Factories (Cotton Shuttles) Special Regulations 1952

The Agriculture (Ladders) Regulations 1957

The Agriculture (Safeguarding of Workplaces) Regulations 1959

The Agriculture (Poisonous Substances) (Extension) Order 1960

The Agriculture (Threshers and Balers) Regulations 1960

The Agriculture (Field Machinery) Regulations 1962

The Cotton Cloth (Record of Humidity) Order 1964

The Agriculture (Poisonous Substances) (Extension) Order 1965

The Agriculture (Poisonous Substances) (Extension) Order 1966.

In addition, it is proposed to repeal the Agriculture (Poisonous Substances) Act 1952, and section 68 and schedule 1 of the Factories Act 1961.

Since the effect in each case will be to reduce rather than increase compliance costs, a CCA is not required. The cost of undertaking a CCA varies from case to case but is generally modest. Because part of the cost falls on the businesses consulted, a full CCA would be inappropriate for measures designed to reduce business burdens.

Dogs and Cats (Identification System)

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate his Department has made of the cost of introducing an identification system for domestic dogs and cats; and what assessment he has made of the feasibility of introducing such a scheme. [3066]

Mr. Clappison: Under the Control of Dogs Order 1992, dogs, other than certain types of working dogs, must wear a collar and identification when in a public place. The Government have no plans either to change this requirement or to introduce any general requirements for the identification of dogs and cats.

Opencast Coal Mines

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many planning applications were made in the United Kingdom for opencast coal mining sites in the last year for which figures are available; and how many of these *(a)* were rejected at the initial stage, *(b)* went to appeal and *(c)* succeeded at appeal. [3307]

Sir Paul Beresford: Information concerning planning applications for opencast coal mining is not held centrally. Statistics are published annually for the County Planning Officers Society by Durham county council. Four appeals were lodged in England in 1995, of which one has been allowed and one dismissed. Two appeals have yet to be determined. Information relating to appeals in Scotland and Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales.

Local Government Finance

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the standard spending assessment reduction grant and police standard spending assessment reduction grant paid to each local authority and police authority in 1996–97; and for each authority, what is that grant as a proportion of *(a)* band D equivalent dwellings and *(b)* chargeable dwellings, as used for council tax setting in 1996–97; [3440]

(2) what is the standing spending assessment reduction grant and police standing spending assessment reduction grant paid to each class of local authority and police authority in 1996–97; and for each such class, what is that grant as a proportion of its aggregate number of *(a)* band D equivalent dwellings and *(b)* chargeable dwellings, as used for council tax setting in 1996–97. [3439]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what changes to the standard spending assessment formula methodology he is assessing for implementation in 1997–98; and for each individual option what is its potential financial impact on each class of local authority in England expressed *(a)* as the net change in its SSA and *(b)* as the net change in its SSA divided by (i) the aggregate number of band D equivalent dwellings and (ii) chargeable dwellings, as used for council tax setting in 1996–97, for that class of authority; [3444]

(2) what changes to the standard spending assessment formula methodology he is assessing for implementation in 1997–98; and for each individual option what is its potential financial impact on each local authority in England *(a)* expressed as the net change in its SSA and *(b)* as the net change in its SSA divided by the number of (i) band D equivalent dwellings and (ii) chargeable dwellings as used for council tax setting in 1996–97, for that authority. [3445]

Sir Paul Beresford: The report of this year's discussions between local and central government on possible changes to the methodology of the SSA formulae has been placed in the Library. The report describes each of the possible changes and gives an estimate of its effect on the SSA of each authority and each class of authority. Tables expressing these estimated changes in terms of the number of band D equivalent dwellings and the number of chargeable dwellings have also been placed in the Library.

Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the local authority powers in the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996 will be brought into force. [3527]

Mr. Clappison: On 17 July this year, we consulted on the practical implementation of the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996. A list of responses to this consultation has been placed in the Library of the House; copies of individual responses may be obtained through the Library.

Following this consultation, we have now made regulations setting the procedure by which local authorities can create areas where people have to clear up after their dogs. We have also made an order setting the fixed penalty for the new offence at £25 and providing a form for the penalty notice. These statutory instruments come into force on 1 December and will allow local authorities to take full advantage of these welcome new powers. We also issuing a circular to local authorities to inform them of the new powers.

Standards in Public Life

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government will respond to the issues raised by the Committee on Standards in Public Life on aspects of conduct in local government in England, Scotland and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [3651]

Mr. Curry: The Government's observations on the matters—which were raised in the "Issues and Questions" paper, which was published by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in June this year—have today been submitted to the Committee. The observations describe the current statutory and other rules governing conduct in local government, offer views on how the particular rules appear to be working, and comment on issues on which the Government would welcome the Committee's views. Copies of the observations have been placed in the Library.

Construction Contracts

Mr. Waller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to consult on the regulations to be made under section 114 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. [3829]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I have today published a consultation document entitled "Making the Scheme for Construction Contracts" containing proposals for regulations to underpin the fair construction contracts provisions in part II of the 1996 Act.

These proposals concern the fall-back arrangements which contracting parties may use if their contracts do not comply with the Act in respect of adjudication and payment procedures. It includes detail on a number of important issues such as the appointment of adjudicators, criteria for appointing bodies, the conduct of adjudication proceedings, and payment machinery.

Scheme procedures may be called upon in a variety of circumstances across all sectors of construction, so I am inviting comments from a wide cross-section of the industry and its customers.

Copies of the consultation document have been placed in the Library.

Krill

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies he has carried out on the effect of the decline in krill on the world's whale population. [2590]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

The UK continues to play a leading role in research into krill populations and the likely impact of developing krill fisheries in the Southern ocean on the whole of the ecosystem, including whale populations, through the research programme of the British Antarctic Survey.

The two BAS programmes concerned with the question of population fluctuations in krill are:

(i) Pelagic ecosystem studies, dealing with the question of sea-ice formation and the effect of surface sea-current systems; average annual expenditure amounts to £100,000 per annum, exclusive of infrastructure costs; and

(ii) Higher predator, studies, dealing with the breeding success and diet and feeding habits of mammals and birds whose food chains depend to varying degrees on the krill population; average annual expenditure in this programme amounts to £100,000 per annum, exclusive of infrastructure costs.

Largely as a result of this UK research, fluctuations in the availability of krill to certain predators are now known to be related to two main causes. These are:

(i) the extent of sea-ice formation in certain years, which impacts on the ability area to survive; and

(ii) the effects of climate phenomena, such as the El Nino southern oscillation.

A further related impact is that of the breeding success of those species which depend on krill.

Sewers

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many critical sewers were *(a)* renovated and *(b)* replaced in each area in England and Wales in each of the 10 years immediately before the privatisation of the water industry; and how many critical sewers have been (i) renovated and (ii) replaced in each year since privatisation. [1888]

Mr. Clappison *[pursuant to his reply, 5 November 1996, c. 464-65]:* The figure contained in column 1 (1994–95) represented a five-year span from 1990–92 to 1994–95 in the case of critical sewers renovated and a four-year span from 1991–92 to 1994–95 in the case of critical sewers replaced, rather than just the financial year 1994-95. The figures included for 1994-5 are also subject to verification. The following tables have therefore been amended accordingly:

Critical sewers renovated (km)

Company	*1990–91 to 94–95*	*1995–96*
Anglian	13	14
Dwr Cymru	13	7
North West	82	26
Northumbrian	102	16
Severn Trent	79	5
South West	29	2
Southern	19	0
Thames	113	24
Wessex	37	14
Yorkshire	17	2

Critical sewers replaced (km)

Company	*1991–92 to 94–95*	*1995–96*
Anglian	31	3
Dwr Cymru	46	18
North West	85	16
Northumbrian	15	1
Severn Trent	225	9
South West	12	4
Southern	14	1
Thames	47	20
Wessex	14	2
Yorkshire	0	2

Water Mains

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many kilometres of water mains were *(a)* renewed and *(b)* relined in each area in England and Wales in each of the 10 years immediately before the privatisation of the water industry; and how much has been (i) renewed and (ii) relined in each year since privatisation. [1887]

Mr. Clappison *[pursuant to his reply, 5 November 1996, c. 465–66]:* The figures contained in column 1 (1994–95) represented a five-year span from 1990–91 to 1994–95 rather than just the financial year 1994–95. The figures included for 1994–95 are also subject to verification. The following tables have therefore been amended accordingly:

Water mains relined (km)

Company	*1990–91 to 94–95*	*1995–96*
Anglian	147	0
Dwr Cymru	487	64
North West	186	0
Northumbrian	1,219	145
Severn Trent	5,202	407
South West	905	156
Southern	162	30
Thames	316	129
Wessex	197	78
Yorkshire	785	167
Bournemouth and West Hants	0	0
Bristol	31	9
Cambridge	12	0
Chester	0	0
Essex and Suffolk	79	55
Folkestone and Dover	131	13

Water mains relined (km)

Company	*1990–91 to 94–95*	*1995–96*
Hartlepool	8	0
Mid Kent	6	0
Mid Southern	13	50
North Surrey	0	0
Portsmouth	1	7
South east	561	81
South Staffs	2	0
Sutton and east Surrey	24	0
Tendring Hundred	49	17
Three Valleys	16	22
Wrexham	100	4
York	0	0

Water mains relined (km)

Company	*1990–91 to 94–95*	*1995–96*
Anglian	1,889	518
Dwr Cymru	907	429
North West	2,470	612
Northumbria[1]	612	149
Severn Trent	2,236	499
South West	179	10
Southern	123	27
Thames	144	15
Wessex	280	84
Yorkshire	699	114
Bournemouth and West Hants	29	23
Bristol	83	3
Cambridge	91	17
Chester	15	2
Essex and Suffolk	42	117
Folkestone and Dover	3	1
Hartlepool	14	3
Mid Kent	178	4
Mid Southern	104	20
North Surrey	25	8
Portsmouth	179	36
South East	113	38
South Staffs	220	102
Sutton and East Surrey	170	22
Tendring Hundred	34	8
Three Valleys	151	49
Wrexham	43	5
York	16	2

[1]Figures for Northumbrian include those of north-east following their merger in 1996.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information British Nuclear Fuels is required to provide to his Department with regard to the environmental safety arrangements made prior to and during the transport of high-level radioactive waste canisters from Sellafield to *(a)* Japan and *(b)* European Union countries; and what is the planned date of the next transport to (i) Japan and (ii) another EU member state. [2960]

Mr. Page: The transport of vitrified waste complies with all relevant national and international regulations governing its movement. The flasks are specifically designed, constructed and transported in accordance with the recommendations and regulations of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The date of the next transport is an operational matter for BNFL.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what environmental provisions covering plutonium-based mixed oxide nuclear fuel and associated wastes will be included in the proposed Euratom-Japan nuclear co-operation agreement. [2957]

Mr. Page: The scope of the proposed Euratom-Japan nuclear co-operation agreement has yet to be worked out between the two parties. Any eventual agreement will be negotiated by the European Commission on behalf of the European Community, after negotiating directives have been agreed by the Council.

Business Breakfast Tours

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 4 November, *Official Report*, column *329*, in respect of business breakfast tours, if he will list the costs of each of the events known to date. [2949]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* The final costs are not yet known.

Electricity Generation

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the advantages of subsidising *(a)* research into and *(b)* trials of tidal and wave generation of electricity; and if he will make a statement. [3191]

Mr. Page: A review of wave energy was published by the DTI in December 1992. The review found that wave energy had limited potential to contribute commercially to energy supplies in the next few decades.

Tidal energy, using both conventional barrages and free standing tidal stream devices, has also been the subject of a DTI programme. The main conclusion of the programme was that tidal energy had poor prospects for commercial deployment in the future, especially as the technology associated with tidal barrages was well developed and the Government believed that there was little potential for significantly reducing costs.

In consequence, the Minister for Energy has previously announced the completion of both the wave and tidal programmes.

Postcodes

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will review the process of formulating postcodes, in order to *(a)* encourage the retention of local identity, *(b)* facilitate the effective operation of delivery and *(c)* ensure that the highway authorities and the Royal Mail wherever possible retain the use of local area names as locality names in postal addresses. [3160]

Mr. Page: No. The designation of postcodes and postal addresses is an operational matter for the Post Office.

Hairdressing Industry

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he intends to take to ensure that the hairdressing industry is regulated so as to protect consumers. [3163]

Mr. Page: The Government's aim is to reduce the burden on industry and we believe that existing consumer legislation is adequate to protect consumers in this area. In addition, the Hairdressing Council administers a voluntary register of practitioners in hairdressing, membership of which carries with it specific qualification requirements.

World Trade Organisation

Mr. Touhig: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the items which he will be pressing to be included on the agenda of the forthcoming Singapore meeting of the World Trade Organisation; and if he will make a statement. [1327]

Mr. Lang: I shall be pressing for Ministers at the World Trade Organisation ministerial meeting in December in Singapore to agree a substantial work programme for the World Trade Organisation to continue the process of multilateral trade liberalisation. This should include: standards, Government procurement, tariffs, trade facilitation, rules of origin, intellectual property rights, subsidies and regulation reform.

I shall also be pressing for timely implementation of existing commitments, the completion of outstanding negotiations on services, in particular telecommunications services, and for the conclusion of an agreement to eliminate tariffs in the information technology sector.

I shall support the start of work in the World Trade Organisation on competition and investment issues.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and I will shortly lay before Parliament a White Paper setting out the Government's approach to trade policy and its interaction with UK foreign policy.

Electricity Black-out (Wales)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultation he has had with the Director-General of Electricity Supply as regards the black-out risk throughout south and mid-Wales on Sunday 20 October. [3108]

Mr. Page: The National Grid Company kept my Department and the Director General of Electricity Supply fully informed of the problems at Aberthaw power station referred to—which took place on 12 to 14 October and not on 20 October—and discussed with us the action which was taken to ensure that the electricity supply to south and mid-Wales was maintained. My Department and the director general will continue to keep the situation under review.

Overseas Projects Fund

Mr. Pope: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many projects have been funded by the overseas projects fund in each of the last five years. [3429]

Mr. Lang: The following is the information:

1991–92: 36
1992–93: 40
1993–94: 46
1994–95: 33
1995–96: 33

Mr. Pope: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in respect of how many projects funded by the overseas project fund his Department has not had direct contact in *(a)* the last six months, *(b)* the last year and *(c)* the last two years; and what is the total amount of public moneys involved. [3454]

Mr. Lang: No information is maintained in the precise form sought by the hon. Member.

Officials maintain regular contact with companies when the latter are drawing down assistance from the overseas projects fund. Officials continue in contact when the company remains in pursuit of the target contract after all the funds offered have been claimed.

Mr. Pope: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much has been spent in each of the last five years on the overseas projects fund. [3430]

Mr. Lang: The following is the information:

1991–92: £4.36 million
1992–93: £5.00 million
1993–94: £5.69 million
1994–95: £5.83 million
1995–95:£5.09 million

Small Businesses

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the presentation of Government policy relating to small businesses. [1320]

Mr. Page: My Department makes every effort to present its small firms policy as widely as possible. For example, its annual report, "Small Firms in Britain", sets out current Government policy for small businesses and includes key statistical indicators. This publication is widely disseminated and a copy is sent to every member.

We have also established a small business Ministers' group with representation across 17 Whitehall Departments. The group is playing a key role in promoting small firms policy within all areas of Government.

The Government's response to the "Your Business Matters" consultation, completed earlier this year, provided an excellent opportunity to set out the framework for small firms policy. In addition to responding directly to the 84 key issues raised by "Your Business Matters" delegates, the Government also outlined 30 measures aimed at helping small businesses to prosper and grow. A copy of "Your Business Matters—Government Response", has been placed in the Library of the House.

Wool Products

Mr. Madden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received from United Kingdom wool textile manufacturers about the recent proposal by the EU to bring forward the abolition of quotas on wool products from 2003 to 1998; what estimates he has made of the likely impact of this proposal on employment within the wool textile sector; and if he will make a statement. [3304]

Mr. Lang: The British Apparel and Textiles Confederation and the Wool Textiles Action Committee have expressed concern about liberalisation of imports of woven wool fabrics under stage 2 of the European Union's phase-out of the multi-fibre arrangement. The Government accept their case and are accordingly arguing within the EU for those products to be excluded from the stage 2 package.

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was his Department's expenditure on consultants to assist with information, publicity, and media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94. [3581]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department's information directorate does not employ consultants. It does, however, use contractors to provide a wide range of publicity and news services in support of the Department's objectives. Such expenditure from centrally managed budgets has been as follows:

£000
1995–96: 10,006
1994–95: 9,119
1993–94: 9,419

Ms Hodge: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost of staff employed full-time or part-time (i) to provide information and publicity and (ii) to work in press or media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94. [3570]

Mr. Taylor: The costs of relevant staff in my information directorate was as follows:

£000

Year	*Publicity*	*Press and media*
1995–96	1,047	919
1994–95	937	817
1993–94	1,151	954

Scientific Laboratories

Mr. Bayley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on progress with market testing the first tranche of Government scientific laboratories. [1316]

Mr. Ian Taylor: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade placed in the Library of the House on 26 January 1996, a copy of the guidelines on the conduct of prior option reviews. These confirmed that research establishments would have their functions rigorously tested to decide whether the function was required at all, and whether there was scope for privatising, contracting out (which could include market testing), merging establishments or transferring work between them.

Announcements have subsequently been made: (i) to privatise ADAS, the Building Research Establishment, and the Royal Observatories; (ii) to create as new executive agencies within the public sector, the Directorate of Fisheries Research, the Fisheries Research Services, and the Forestry Commission Research Division; and (iii) that the Central Laboratory for the Research Councils, the National Weights and Measures Laboratory, the Health and Safety Laboratory, and the Scottish Agricultural Science Agency retain their current status within the public sector.

Information on the market testing of individual functions of each establishment is not held centrally.

Opencast Coal Mines

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many opencast coal mining sites are currently in operation; where they are situated; and what is the annual tonnage of coal extracted. [3306]

Mr. Page: There are 95 opencast coal mining sites currently in operation and their locations are given in the following table. The tonnage of coal extracted from opencast sites in 1995 was 16,369,000 tonnes.

Opencast sites

Site name	*Location*
Airdsgreen	East Ayrshire
Arden Quarry	Derbyshire
Arkwright Colliery Reclamation	Derbyshire
Bag Lane	Wigan
Ballochney	North Lanarkshire
Blairfordel	Perth and Kinross
Bleak House	Staffordshire
Blindwells Extension	East Lothian
Blinkbonny West Mine	Midlothian
Braehead	Fife
Brawds Level	Neath and Port Talbot
Birch Vale Quarry	Derbyshire
Broughton Lodge	Cumbria
Burnfoot Moor	East Ayrshire
Cairncubie	Fife
Candles	Shropshire
Carters Ford West	St. Helens
Castle Farm	Durham
Chalmerston	East Ayrshire
Chester House	Northumberland
Clarence Farm Extension	Durham
Colliersdean	Northumberland
Common Farm Phase III	East Ayrshire
Cynheidre	Carmarthenshire
Dalquhandy	South Lanarkshire
Damside	North Lanarkshire
Derlwyn 2	Neath and Port Talbot
Doe Hill House	Derbyshire
East Pit Extension	Neath and Port Talbot
Easter Balbeggie Farm	Fife
Easter Fortissat	North Lanarkshire
Edge Farm	South Lanarkshire
Fencehillhead	Falkirk
Ffos Las	Carmarthenshire
Gilfach Iago	Carmarthenshire
Glascoed	Wrexham
Greenside Farm	North Lanarkshire
Grove Farm	Leeds
Grove Farm (Extended)	Leeds
Hannahston Farm	East Ayrshire
Hare Hill Site	South Lanarkshire
Hawks Nest Wood	Leeds

Opencast sites

Site name	*Location*
Henllan Uchaf	Powys
Ireland Colliery	Derbyshire
Kidburngill	Cumbria
Kirk (revised)	Derbyshire
Laigh Riggend	North Lanarkshire
Lambhill Remainder	Perth and Kinross
Leadbrook Hall	Flintshire
Llanilid West Revised	Rhondda, Cynon and Taff
Lletty'r Crudd	Neath and Port Talbot
Lodge Coppice	Shropshire
Low Gordon	Durham
Lowca	Cumbria
Marks Quarry	Durham
Methley Park	Leeds
Moorgreen	Nottinghamshire
Mossband Farm	North Lanarkshire
Nadins	Derbyshire
Nant Helen	Powys
New Farm	Midlothian
Northwood	Durham
Norwood	Gateshead
Odd House Farm	Leicestershire
Orgreave Reclamation	Rotherham
Oxenfoord	Midlothian
Park Slip West	Merthyr Tydfil
Piperhill	East Ayrshire
Plenmeller	Northumberland
Prathouse Site	Fife
Priors Close North	Durham
Rainge	Derbyshire
Reedswood Reclamation	Walsall
Rockingham	Barnsley
Rosslynlee	Midlothian
Roughcastle North	Falkirk
Rye Hill	Sunderland
Sarn Helen Opencast	Neath and Port Talbot
Shellbrook and Wood Farm	Leicestershire
Shortrig Gorbachev	Falkirk
Smotherfly	Derbyshire
South Brandon Extension	Durham
Stanley Moss	Durham
Stobswood	Northumberland
Trecatti Landfill Opencast	Caerphilly
Trinity III	Derbyshire
Trinity III Deep Hard Opencast	Derbyshire
Wagtail	Durham
Waingroves III	Derbyshire
Wester Mosshat Farm	South Lanarkshire
Westfield Link	Fife
Whittington Sewage Treatment Works	Derbyshire
Whitwell Drift	Durham
Woodbine Opencast Site	Barnsley
Woodmuir	South Lanarkshire

Source:

The Coal Authority.

British Coal Land

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much money British Coal's land sales have raised to date; and what acreage has been bought by coalmining companies. [3305]

Mr. Page: The sale of British Coal's property is a matter for the corporation.

Enterprise Britain Initiative

Mr. Hoon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 30 October, *Official Report,* column *154* if he will list the constituencies in which meetings have so far been arranged under the enterprise Britain initiative; and what is the projected cost to date. [2291]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 6 November 1996]:* The programme of events is still being arranged. Events are being held in cities and smaller towns across Britain and are not being held for individual parliamentary constituencies. The first events will be in Luton and Lincoln on 11 November. The cost of these and future events will depend on the number of participants.

Biomass Plants

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many biomass plants are operating in the UK under the non-fossil fuel obligation; where they are situated; and what is the potential output of each plant. [2975]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* Two poultry—litter fuelled electricity generating stations are operating in the UK under the non-fossil fuel obligation, at Diss in Suffolk and Scunthorpe in Humberside. Each has a declared net capacity of 12.69 mw. In addition, an installation at Piddlehinton in Dorset, utilising pig slurry as a fuel, is currently generating under the NFFO. It has a capacity of 0.1 mw.

A further poultry-litter fuelled power station with a capacity of 38.5 mw is under construction at Thetford in Norfolk.

Manufacturing Investment

Mr. Corbett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the presentation of the Government's policies relating to manufacturing investment. [1321]

Mr. Greg Knight: Manufacturing investment is primarily a matter for manufacturing companies. The role of Government is to encourage enterprise by providing a stable macroeconomic environment, making markets work better, and helping firms to help themselves through the provision of high quality business support services.

The Government set out their policies to achieve these objectives in "Competitiveness: Creating the Enterprise Centre of Europe", Cm 3300. My right. hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and other Ministers are explaining these policies to business people and listening to their concerns at a series of business breakfasts being held in several towns and cities.

Launch Aid

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the last project supported by his Department under the launch aid programme; when this took place; and what was the level of the support. [991]

Mr. Greg Knight *[pursuant to the reply, 30 October, Official Report, column 152]:* The hon. Member should be aware that part of the amount remaining to be paid has been allocated in 1996–97.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings (i) he, (ii) other Ministers and (iii) officials from his Department *(a)* have had and *(b)* plan to have with representatives of the Australian Government to discuss the report of the Canberra commission on the elimination of nuclear weapons. [2929]

Mr. David Davis: We have regular discussions with the Australian Government on nuclear non-proliferation and arms control issues. The Australian Government have made clear that the Canberra commission acted as an independent body.

Death Penalty

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he plans to make to the Governments of Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine and Russia concerning *(a)* the abolition of the death penalty and *(b)* resolution 1097 (1996) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe; and if he will make a statement. [2745]

Mr. Hanley: The European Union made a demarche to Ukraine on 31 October, and to Russia on 4 November, encouraging them to fulfil commitments made to the Council of Europe to introduce moratoriums on the death penalty. The Presidents of Latvia and Lithuania have declared moratoriums on the death penalty pending parliamentary discussion of its abolition.

Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to lay draft legislation before Parliament to ratify the comprehensive test ban treaty; what form that draft legislation will take; and if he will make a statement. [2961]

Mr. David Davis: We are considering what steps will be necessary, including legislation, to enable the United kingdom to ratify the treaty.

Japan (Fast Reactor Accident)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek from his Japanese counterpart information on the official assessment of the environmental implications of the sodium release from the accident at the Monju fast reactor in Japan. [2959]

Dr. Liam Fox: The embassy in Tokyo has been asked to obtain from the Japanese authorities the information mentioned in the hon. Member's question. It will be passed to him as soon as possible.

Pakistan

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the findings of the UN special rapporteur in respect of the activities of the security forces in Pakistan. [3043]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The special rapporteur on torture has reported instances of serious human rights abuses in Pakistan. We expect such allegations to be fully investigated. We have raised human rights issues with Pakistan and will continue to do so.

Croatia

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Croatia's current allocation from the know-how fund. [3162]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The know-how fund has allocated £0.5 million to Croatia for the current financial year.

Mrs. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are his Department's priorities for allocations from the know-how fund in Croatia. [3161]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: A project identification mission to Croatia in February 1996, arranged by the know-how fund, identified financial and economic services, small and medium enterprise development, health care administration and environment as priority areas for know-how fund support in 1996–97.

Information Technology Projects

Ms Church: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many information technology project have been undertaken since 1992 and are planned for the coming year, in cost bands of £1,000,000. [1899]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* The diplomatic wing and the Overseas Development Administration have undertaken 178 information technology projects since 1 April 1992. We plan to pursue 41 projects, including seven new ones, in the financial year 1997–98. However, plans depend on available resources, including private sector capital under the private finance initiative.

The table gives details:

Capital cost (£ million)	*IT projects since financial year 1992–93*	*Projects planned for financial year 1997–98*
0–1	166	34
1–2	5	7
2–3	2	0
4–5	1	0
5–6	1	0
10–11	2	0
16–17	1	0
Total	178	41

TREASURY

Unemployed Claimant Count

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many people would have been included in the unemployed claimant count if the changes in the method of calculation since 1979 had not taken place; [1142]

(2) if he will list the changes made in the unemployed claimant count since 1979, outlining how many people were added or removed from the claimant count figures as a result of each change; [1141]

(3) how many people are excluded from the unemployed claimant count because they are in dispute with the Employment Service. [1145]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 11 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to the three questions you have tabled on the coverage of the claimant count measure of unemployment.

Current numbers on old definitions

It is not ONS policy to make estimates of the numbers of people who would be included in the monthly claimant count if the benefit rules which were in place in 1979 still applied. Such estimates would be unreliable as they would relate to hypothetical situations and would therefore involve unwarranted speculation about the behaviour of individuals. We do however assess the impact of each relevant benefit change and if necessary recast the seasonally adjusted series to give an estimate of the claimant count, based on its current coverage, which is consistent over time. The latest consistent historic time series, available from January 1971 for the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland and from April 1974 for the standard regions, can be accessed from the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library.

Changes in the count since 1979

An article entitled *Changes to the coverage of the monthly count of claimant unemployment* was published in the November 1995 edition of *Labour Market Trends*. This provides a complete listing of changes in the coverage of the monthly claimant unemployment count, including nine which were significant enough in the view of government statisticians to warrant a recasting of the consistent seasonally adjusted series. Past editions of *Labour Market Trends* are available in the House of Commons Library.

Claimants who are in dispute with the Employment Service

People whose claims are going through the adjudication process at the time the monthly figures are compiled will be included in the monthly count. Statistics on the outcomes of adjudication are published quarterly by the Employment Service in *Analysis of Adjudication Officer's Decisions*. No statistics are available on the numbers included in the claimant count who subsequently cease claiming after an adjudication decision has been made against them. The Employment Service publication is also available in the Library.

Public Expenditure

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of United Kingdom public expenditure is discharged by *(a)* the Scottish Office, *(b)* the Welsh Office and *(c)* the Northern Ireland Office. [2132]

Mr. Waldegrave: The proportion of general Government expenditure discharged by these Departments in 1994–95 was:

Scottish Office: 5.0 per cent.

Welsh Office: 2.2 per cent.

Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland departments: 2.8 per cent.

Mr. Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of United Kingdom public expenditure is spent in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland. [2130]

Mr. Waldegrave: The proportion of general Government expenditure identified as being for the benefit of each country in 1994–95 was:

England: 61.1 per cent.

Scotland:8.0 per cent.

Wales: 4.3 per cent.

Northern Ireland: 2.8 per cent.

The remaining 23.8 per cent. of public expenditure is not attributable to any one country. Her Majesty's Treasury collects information to identify, where possible, which country is to benefit from expenditure, not where the expenditure occurs.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the amount of public spending per capita for each of the last five years for which figures are available in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales. [2633]

Mr. Waldegrave: The figures requested are published in tables 7.2b, 7.3b, 7.4b, 7.5b and 7.6b of "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 1996–97", Cmn 3201, which is available in the Library.

Lost Tax Revenue

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what investigation he has instituted into the amount of tax revenue lost to the Exchequer, owing to *(a)* persons reducing their overtime working and *(b)* persons leaving employment as a result of the requirements of child support legislation. [2449]

Mr. Jack: No specific investigations have been instituted. However, such factors as changes in working patterns are taken into account when tax forecasts are produced.

Incontinence Products (VAT)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue will be raised in a full year as a result of the extension of VAT to the supply of incontinence products to NHS trusts and non–charitable residential and nursing homes; what the cost to the NHS will be; and if he will make a statement. [2629]

Mr. Oppenheim: Under the Value Added Tax Act 1994, incontinence products are zero rated only when supplied directly to a disabled person or to a charity that makes them available to a disabled person. Supplies of incontinence products to the NHS and non–charitable residential and nursing homes have always been standard rated.

Value Added Tax

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* court judgments and *(b)* administrative decisions have extended the coverage of VAT without the specific authority of primary legislation since 1990; how much revenue was received in the most recent full year for which figures are available as a result of each decision; and which goods or services were covered by each extension. [2634]

Mr. Oppenheim: Records of court judgments and administrative decisions affecting the interpretation or application of VAT legislation are not maintained in a way that could provide this information.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases are pending in the United Kingdom courts against HM Customs and Excise concerning the repayment of VAT; how many of these are for recovery of debt in respect of VAT reclaims for the years 1993 or earlier; and if he will make a statement. [2649]

Mr. Oppenheim: There are 125 cases before the VAT and duties tribunals concerning Customs' decision to defer repayments over three years old. Four cases have already been heard, with the tribunal chairman deciding that he had no power to order Customs and Excise to repay the deferred amounts. In addition, four applicants have been given leave for a judicial review in respect of Customs' policy of deferment.

Audit Visits

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 29 October, *Official Report*, column *60*, how many audit visits for *(a)* large employers and *(b)* other employers have been conducted since 6 April; and what percentage of these visits are made up by (i) joint visits and (ii) single visits covering pay-as-you-earn and national insurance contributions. [3196]

Mr. Jack: Between 6 April and 30 September 1996, the Inland Revenue conducted 291 visits to large employers. Of these, 31—10.7 per cent.—were joint visits and 260—89.3 per cent.—single visits covering both PAYE and NICs; 20,933 visits were made to other employers. Of these, 17,823—85.1 per cent.—were single visits covering both PAYE and NICs. The remaining 3,110—14.9 per cent.—related to instances where a visit by the Contributions Agency revealed evidence of PAYE irregularities requiring further investigation by the Inland Revenue.

Joint visits for these employers are not seen as appropriate.

Drugs Deaths

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his most recent calculation of the number of people who have died in each of the past five years as a result of using *(a)* methadone, *(b)* temazepam, *(c)* diazepam and *(d)* heroin. [1551]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 5 November 1996]:* The information falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 11 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the numbers of people who have died in each of the last five years as a result of using methadone, temazepam, diazepam and heroin.

The numbers of deaths in 1991–1992 as a result of using methadone, temazepam, diazepam and heroin are published in Table 10 of *Mortality statistics: injury and poisoning, England and Wales*, Series DH4, nos. 17 and 18, copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library.

The information for 1993, 1994 and 1995 could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Information Technology Projects

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many information technology projects have been undertaken since 1992 and are planned for the coming year, in cost bands of £1,000,000. [1898]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* The total number of information technology projects undertaken by the Treasury, within the costs bands and years stated, are shown in the table:

Projects undertaken in year

Project value	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*[1]
£10,000–£1 million	13	17	12	23	25	7
£1 million–£2 million	0	0	1	0	0	0
£2 million–£3 million	0	0	0	1	0	0
£3 million–£4 million	0	0	0	1	0	0

[1] Planned.

There were no IT projects with a value greater than £4 million from 1992 to 1996 and there are none planned for 1997–98.

Qualifications

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* each English region, *(c)* England, *(d)* Wales, *(e)* Scotland and *(f)* Northern Ireland the percentage of those unemployed who have (i) a degree or equivalent qualification, (ii) A-level or equivalent, (iii) an apprenticeship, (iv) a GCSE or equivalent and (v) no qualifications. [2981]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Stephen Byers, dated 11 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question asking for a breakdown of the unemployed according to level of qualification by region.

The available information for the United Kingdom is shown in the table attached.

	All persons ILO unemployed of working age (thousands) of which (percentage) with highest qualification[1]	Degree or other higher education	'A' level and equivalent (excluding trade apprenticeships)	Trade apprenticeship	GCSE or equivalent	Other	No Qualification
United Kingdom	2,344	11.6	12.3	10.6	18.1	20.0	27.4
Great Britain	2,274	11.7	12.3	10.4	18.2	20.4	27.0
England	1,942	11.8	12.2	9.7	18.1	20.8	27.4
South East	742	14.1	12.8	8.7	16.7	22.1	25.5
Greater London	379	15.6	11.2	7.1	15.8	23.7	26.5
Rest of South East	362	12.6	14.4	10.5	17.7	20.3	24.5
East Anglia	72	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	21.1	23.6	23.0
South West	169	12.7	14.9	10.1	22.1	18.4	22.0
West Midlands	219	9.0	12.1	6.6	16.9	19.5	35.9
East Midlands	152	9.9	13.4	11.5	18.5	18.7	28.0
Yorkshire and Humberside	189	11.0	11.9	8.2	18.3	20.2	30.4
North west	248	11.9	9.4	10.7	19.9	20.0	28.2
North	151	7.1	11.3	16.5	16.8	22.1	26.3
Wales	114	9.3	9.7	10.8	19.2	20.2	30.8
Scotland	218	12.0	14.6	16.0	19.1	16.6	21.6
Northern Ireland	69	[2]—	[2]—	19.4	14.1	[2]—	41.0

Notes:
[1]Working age is men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59. Includes those who did not answer, but percentages are based on totals excluding them.
[2]Sample size too small for reliable estimate.
Source:
Labour Force Survey (winter 1995–96), Office for National Statistics.

Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the recently agreed highly indebted poor countries initiative; and if he will make a statement. [1329]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) on 14 October, *Official Report*, columns *705–06*.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the report of the Canberra commission on the elimination of nuclear weapons. [2931]

Mr. Soames: We have noted the conclusions of the Canberra commission. We remain committed to the pursuit of negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to nuclear disarmament, as set out in article VI of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. But nuclear disarmament cannot realistically be pursued independently of the broader security context. We and NATO continue to judge that nuclear deterrence plays an essential role in maintaining peace and stability in Europe.

Unidentified Flying Objects

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the circumstances of the two occasions referred to in his answer of 24 July, *Official Report*, column *424*, when RAF aircraft were scrambled or diverted from task to investigate uncorrelated radar targets; if the objects were identified; if it was judged that breaches of United Kingdom airspace had occurred; and if he will list all similar incidents which have occurred since 1979. [2932]

Mr. Soames: The targets were identified as Russian maritime patrol aircraft and were in the northern portion of the UK air defence region. They did not penetrate UK airspace. Information covering the period from 1979 is not held in a readily available form and could be provided only at disproportionate cost and effort.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when United Kingdom military personnel were briefed about the scrambling of Belgian F-16 aircraft on 30 and 31 March 1990; when the unidentified flying object concerned was detected on United Kingdom radar systems; and if RAF aircraft were scrambled. [3185]

Mr. Soames: The Belgian authorities did not notify adjacent countries because no threat was perceived. There is no evidence of radar contacts within the UK air defence system.

Radiation

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the radiation readings, reported to his Department by Lieutenant Colonel Charles Halt on 13 January 1981, were judged to have posed any threat to Lieutenant Colonel Halt and his team; who assessed the readings; how the radiation compared with background radiation in the area; and if he will make a statement. [2934]

Mr. Soames: There is no record of any official assessment of the radiation readings reported by Lieutenant Colonel Halt.

India

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to meet his Indian counterpart to discuss India's concerns over signing the comprehensive test ban treaty. [2930]

Mr. Soames: None, but we routinely discuss a wide range of issues with the Indian Government.

Armoured Vehicles

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what maintenance is currently being carried out to armoured vehicles at Ashchurch which was previously dealt with at the Army vehicle depot at Ludgershall. [2933]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from K. J. W. Goad to Mr. Paul Murphy, dated 11 November 1996:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence, about what maintenance is currently being carried out to armoured vehicles at Ashchurch which was previously dealt with at the Army Vehicle Depot at Ludgershall, as this matters falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency.

The maintenance required by armoured vehicles stored at the Base Vehicle Depot (BVD) Ashchurch is being carried out by staff, to the same exacting standards demanded by the Army's Equipment Managers, as was the case when armoured vehicles were stored at BVD Ludgershall.

I hope this fully answers your question.

Royal Squadron

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who, other than entitled members of the royal family, are passengers entitled to use the royal squadron. [3097]

Mr. Soames: In addition to the royal family, No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron aircraft may be used by Government Ministers, senior officers and officials of the MOD in fulfilment of their official duties, as well as meeting operational, exercise and flying training requirements. Visiting foreign dignitaries may also be flown, when appropriate: such additional usage adds to overall cost effectiveness.

Departmental Staff

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* civilians and *(b)* service personnel are employed by his Department; and what was the total cost of employing each category. [3238]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is contained in the UK defence statistics 1996, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. The latest available estimates of costs are contained in table 1.2 and the related figures for numbers of personnel are in table 2.1.

Principal headings of the Defence budget

Current prices (£ million)

	Outturn					*Outturn*		*Estimate*	
	1975–76	*1980–81*	*1985–86*	*1990–91*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Total expenditure	5,346	11,182	17,943	22,298	23,762	23,424	22,519	21,715	21,425
Expenditure on personnel	2,530	4,556	6,379	8,811	10,504	9,835	9,313	8,684	8,516
of the Armed Forces	1,305	2,460	3,510	4,811	5,634	6,907	6,490	6,175	6,191
of the retired Armed Forces	255	503	899	1,406	1,950	—	—	—	—
of civilian staff	970	1,593	1,970	2,594	2,920	2,928	2,823	2,509	2,325
Expenditure on equipment	1,792	4,885	8,193	8,838	8,711	9,200	8,819	9,019	8,460
Sea	440	1,513	2,499	2,955	2,891	2,589	2,441	2,203	1,999
Land	413	904	1,887	1,927	1,846	1,806	1,642	1,841	1,594
Air	752	2,059	3,296	3,197	3,152	3,245	3,184	3,357	3,444
Other	187	410	511	759	822	1,559	1,552	1,618	1,423
Other expenditure	1,024	1,741	3,371	4,649	4,547	4,389	4,387	4,012	4,449
Works, buildings and land	394	623	1,413	2,067	1,780	2,073	2,402	1,917	1,858
Miscellaneous stores and services	630	1,118	1,958	2,582	2,767	2,316	1,985	2,095	2,591
Total expenditure at 1994–95 prices	25,129	25,485	28,856	26,956	25,181	24,161	22,519	20,963	20,129

Percentage of total expenditure

	Outturn					*Outturn*		*Estimate*	
	1975–76	*1980–81*	*1985–86*	*1990–91*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*[4]	*1994–95*[5]	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Expenditure on personnel	47.3	40.7	35.6	39.5	44.2	42.0	41.3	40.0	39.8
of the Armed Forces	24.4	22.0	19.6	21.6	23.7	29.5	28.8	28.4	28.9
of the retired Armed Forces	4.8	4.5	5.0	6.3	8.3	—	—	—	—
of civilian staff	18.1	14.2	11.0	11.6	12.3	12.5	12.5	11.6	10.9
Expenditure on equipment	33.5	43.7	45.7	39.6	36.7	39.3	39.2	41.3	39.4
Sea	8.2	13.5	13.9	13.3	12.2	11.0	10.9	10.1	9.3
Land	7.7	8.1	10.5	8.6	7.8	7.7	7.3	8.5	7.4
Air	14.1	18.4	18.4	14.3	13.3	13.9	14.1	15.5	16.1
Other	3.5	3.7	2.8	3.4	3.4	6.7	6.9	7.5	6.6
Other expenditure	19.2	15.6	18.8	20.9	19.1	18.7	19.5	18.5	20.8
Works, buildings and land	7.4	5.6	7.9	9.3	7.5	8.9	10.7	8.8	8.7
Miscellaneous stores etc.	11.8	10.0	10.9	11.6	11.6	9.8	8.8	9.6	12.1

Source:
MOD Resources and Programmes (Finance).

Regular service and civilian personnel strength

1 April *Thousands*

	1975	*1980*	*1985*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Total personnel	664.3	605.0	542.9	487.0	476.3	468.9	438.9	404.0	371.8	354.0
Service	347.7	328.8	336.4	314.7	307.1	302.4	283.0	261.7	238.6	227.3
Civilian	316.7	276.2	206.5	172.3	169.1	166.5	155.9	142.3	133.2	126.7
Split by:										
UK personnel	606.0	560.4	500.3	447.1	438.3	432.9	404.1	376.0	349.5	332.3
Service	338.4	320.6	326.2	305.7	298.1	293.4	274.8	254.5	233.3	222.4
Civilian	266.6	239.8	174.1	141.4	140.2	139.5	129.2	121.6	116.1	109.9
Locally entered/engaged	59.4	44.6	42.6	40.0	38.0	36.0	34.8	28.0	22.3	21.7
Service	9.3	8.2	10.2	9.0	9.1	9.0	8.2	7.2	5.2	4.8
Civilian	50.1	36.4	32.4	30.9	26.9	27.0	26.6	20.7	17.1	16.9
Royal Irish (Home Service)	—	—	—	—	—	—	6.6	5.4	5.3	5.0

Source:
DASA (Civilian and tri-service).

NATO

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the *(a)* gross and *(b)* net expenditure by the United Kingdom on NATO in each of the last five years, with a breakdown between the (i) military, (ii) infrastructure and (iii) civil budget; what is the percentage contribution the United Kingdom makes to each budget; and what is the total spending by NATO under each budget for each of those years. [1678]

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom contributes between 17.58 and 21.98 per cent. of NATO's military budget, and between 10.5394 and 12.1757 per cent. of the security investment programme—formerly known as the infrastructure programme—budget, depending on whether 14, 15 or all 16 nations are participating in any particular segment of the programme; total expenditure on each budget, and the UK's gross and net contributions for each of the last five years are shown in the table.

UK contributions to NATO budgets[1]

Military budget[2]

	Overall NATO budget	*UK contribution*
1991	341.7	67.0
1992	373.4	72.6
1993	369.4	70.9
1994	349.5	69.6
1995	250.3	52.4

SIP (Infrastructure)

£ million

	Overall NATO budget	*UK contribution (gross)*	*UK contribution (net)*
1991	798.6	168.7	132.6
1992	787.9	154.4	115.9
1993	743.6	111.8	61.1

SIP (Infrastructure)

£ million

	Overall NATO budget	*UK contribution (gross)*	*UK contribution (net)*
1994	536.9	127.5	73.6
1995	522.6	80.9	58.9

[1]The SIP and military budgets are calculated in NATO artificial currencies, known as accounting units, and paid in instalments. The exchange rates between these units and individual national currencies vary during the year. The above figures are calculated using the exchange rates in force at the time each payment was made.

[2]UK receipts from the military budget are minimal (of the order of £400,000K pa).

The UK contribution to the civil budget is almost entirely funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. This budget has been maintained at zero real growth throughout the last five years with the UK contribution set at 18.82 per cent. The 1995 budget was £115 million, of which the UK's contribution was £21.6 million.

Electric Shock Dog Collars

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) which (i) regiments and (ii) other section of the armed forces and the MOD police, are using dog collars that administer electric shocks to the animals; [3077]

(2) what is the number of dogs owned by any section of the armed forces and the MOD police, on which electric shock dog collars *(a)* have been used and *(b)* are currently being used; [3078]

(3) what guidelines he has given to (i) the armed forces and (ii) the MOD police, on the use of dog collars that administer electric shocks to the animals. [3076]

Mr. Soames: These are essentially matters for the chief executive of the Defence Animal Centre and the chief executive and chief constable of the Ministry of Defence Police. I have asked them to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from W. E. E. Boreham to Mr. David Rendel, dated 11 November 1996:

I am replying to those parts of your Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about electric shock collars in relation to police dogs as this falls into my area of responsibility as Chief Constable/Chief Executive of the Ministry of Defence Police Agency.

Electric shock collars are not used in my Force on police dogs and I have no plans to introduce such equipment.

Letter from A.H. Roache to Mr. David Rendel, dated 11 November 1996:

I am replying to your three Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about the use of dog collars that administer electric shocks to the animals as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Animal Centre (DAC).

As the focal point for animal training for the three Services, the DAC does not make use of such pieces of equipment in training of dogs and consequently, no guidelines for usage have ever been issued.

By the same token, no Service unit would ever be advised to use an item such as this on one of their animals. If, having left the DAC after training, a dog proved to be unsuitable for its role for whatever reason, it would be returned to the DAC for evaluation and re-training. If the dog could not be brought back to the required standard, it would be replaced.

Anglo-French Summit

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the members of his Department who attended the Anglo-French summit in Bordeaux and *(b)* the positions they hold. [3614]

Mr. Soames: Accompanying my right. hon. Friend the Secretary of Defence to the UK-French summit in Bordeaux on 7 to 8 November were the First Sea Lord, the deputy-under secretary for policy and his principal private secretary.

PRIME MINISTER

Information Technology Projects

Ms Church: To ask the Prime Minister how many information technology projects have been undertaken since 1992 and are planned for the coming year, in cost bands of £1,000,000. [1901]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* For these purposes, my Office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Lady to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General today.

State Opening (Costs)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total cost to the Government of the state opening of Parliament. [2807]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* Some £40,000 has been set aside between the two Houses for the state opening of Parliament and £1,600 has been allocated for the printing of the Queen's Speech. This does not include any additional cost of police and military staff who took part in the ceremony, which are not separately costed.

WALES

Permaculture

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimates he has made of the number of farms or holdings operating on permaculture principles; and if he will make a statement. [2347]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: None.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the work of the permaculture farm at Tir Penrhos Isaf in Gwynedd; what plans he has to encourage permaculture within national parks; and if he will make a statement. [2359]

Mr. Evans: No assessment has been made and there are no plans to encourage permaculture within national parks in Wales.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the practice and benefits of permaculture within Wales; and if he will make a statement. [2352]

Mr. Evans: None.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each year since 1994 the estimated number of organic farms or holdings in Wales; in each year, how many of these organic farms or holdings operated under the principles of permaculture; and if he will make a statement. [2321]

Mr. Evans: There are currently 101 registered organic producers in Wales representing an area of 3,377 hectares. Details for earlier years are not available. No estimate has been made of the number of organic farms operating on permaculture principles.

Local Exchange Trading Schemes

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the desirability of providing financial aid and incentives to encourage rural local authorities to set up specific local exchange trading schemes to help farmers cope during the BSE crisis; and if he will make a statement. [2312]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 7 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *657*.

Security Systems (Schools)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what sums he will make available to *(a)* local education authorities and *(b)* schools for security systems; if he will compensate those schools which installed security systems ahead of his allocations; and if he will make a statement. [2261]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Measures to improve school security for LEA-maintained schools have been included in the grants for education, support and training—GEST—programme for 1997–98. It is for LEAs to determine funding arrangements in their areas. Security measures for voluntary aided and grant-maintained schools may be made available from within their respective capital grant proposals.

New Hospital (Porthmadog)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales by what date he expects to complete the private finance initiative procedures in respect of the proposed new hospital at Porthmadog; when he expects work to start on building; and when completion is scheduled. [2204]

Mr. Hague: The private finance initiative procedures for this scheme are being undertaken by the Gwynedd Community NHS trust, I understand that the North Wales health authority is undertaking a major review of all community hospital facilities in north Wales and that a delay of some six months will be required pending the outcome of that review.

Hospitals (Private Finance Initiative)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hospitals in Wales are involved in private finance initiative bids by area. [2266]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The following are involved in private finance initiative bids where the proposed scheme costs exceeds their delegated capital spending limits—although all trusts test for private sector interest within the private finance initiative for all capital schemes:

North Wales health authority
Gwynedd Community NHS trust
Gwynedd Hospitals NHS trust
Dyfed Powys health authority
Carmarthen and District NHS Trust
Derwen NHS trust
Powys Healthcare NHS trust
Morgannwg health authority
Glan-Y-Mor NHS trust
Bro Taf health authority
University Hospital of Wales Healthcare NHS trust
Cardiff Community Healthcare NHS Trust
Velindre NHS trust
Gwent health authority
Glan Hafren NHS trust
Gwent Community NHS trust
Nevil Hall NHS trust

Organic Farming

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each year since 1994 *(a)* what forms of financial aid are available exclusively for organic farmers, *(b)* what administrative procedures were required for its acquisition, *(c)* how much money was earmarked, and *(d)* what percentage of the money annually earmarked was received by farmers in that year; and if he will make a statement. [2350]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The organic aid scheme provides direct financial support for farmers wishing to convert from conventional to organic production methods.

To obtain aid, a farmer must register the land as in conversion with the UK register of organic food standards—UKROFS—or a body approved by UKROFS, and undertake to convert to organic agriculture in accordance with the rules of the scheme and UKROFS organic production standards.

The scheme provision and percentage paid to farmers during the financial years 1994–95 and 1995–96 and provision for 1996–97 are shown in the table:

(£ thousands)

Financial year	*Provision*	*Percentage outturn*
1994–95	170	0
1995–96	296	2
1996–97	382	—

Difficulty obtaining suitable technical advice and information may have deterred some farmers. I was therefore pleased to launch the Welsh organic conversion information service last September. The service provides a telephone helpline and free advisory visits to prospective organic farmers. Interest has been strong and I hope that more farmers will be encouraged to convert as a result of this imaginative initiative.

Child Abuse Inquiry

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what financial assistance he plans to make available to Flintshire county council and North Wales police authority with regard to their additional costs incurred as a result of the north Wales child abuse inquiry. [1935]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the Attorney-General's parliamentary answer of 29 January 1990—*Official Report*, column *26*—and confirm that the Government will not meet the costs of substantial bodies of this kind in respect of tribunals and public inquiries unless there are special circumstances.

New Medical School

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for a new medical school within the university of Wales at *(a)* Bangor and *(b)* Swansea. [2441]

Mr. Hague: I have no such plans.

Death Rates

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what analysis he has made of the current trends in death rates from *(a)* suicide, *(b)* road accidents, *(c)* violence, *(d)* drugs and *(e)* other causes for men aged (i) 15 to 24 and (ii) 25 to 44 years, relative to the targets set out in the Welsh "The Health of the Nation" publications. [2647]

Mr. Hague: There are no specific targets for men in these age groups set out in the Welsh protocols for investment in health gain. Analyses of death rates for men aged 15 to 44 years were set out in "Welsh Health", the 1995 annual report of the chief medical officer, in particular figures 2.10 and 2.11 on pages 13 and 14 respectively. The report is available in the Library of the House.

The injuries protocol does include a target for reducing the death rate from road traffic accidents for persons aged 15 to 24 years. Progress towards this target is described on page 32 of the chief medical officer's annual report.

Health Promotion

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what analysis he has made of the current trends in obesity relative to the targets for health improvement set out in Welsh "The Health of the Nation" publications; [2645]

(2) what analysis he has made of the trends in *(a)* drug misuse and *(b)* smoking among teenagers published in his chief medical officer's annual report for 1995, with particular reference to the targets set out in previous Welsh "The Health of the Nation" publications. [2646]

Mr. Hague: The chief medical officer's report for 1995 analyses current trends. Informed by the report's findings, national health gain indicators are currently being prepared, and these will feed through into the strategic plans of health authorities in 1997. This will enable health authorities to focus attention on particular problem areas and my Department to monitor action to bring about improvements.

Mortality and Morbidity Statistics

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list each of the areas of mortality and morbidity referred to in his chief medical officer's 1995 annual report where the trend since 1989 is *(a)* better than the targets set that year, *(b)* at or around the target and *(c)* worse than the target; and if he will make a statement. [2658]

Mr. Hague: The following areas of mortality and morbidity, referred to in the chief medical officer's annual report 1995, demonstrate a trend since 1989 which is:

(a) better than the target set:

Deaths from road traffic accidents ages 0 to 14, 65 and over

Deaths from accidents other than road traffic accidents

Deaths from coronary heart disease under the age of 65

Death from strokes under the age of 65, 65 and over

Deaths from lung cancer in men ages 45 to 64

Death from breast cancer in women ages 50 to 64

Death from cervical cancer in women ages 45 to 64

Dental injuries in children

(b) at or around the target set:

Perinatal mortality (still births and deaths in the first week of life)

Infant mortality (deaths in the first year of life)

Smoking in adults

Deaths from suicide in women

Deaths from lung cancer in women ages 45 to 65

Deaths from colorectal cancer ages 45 to 64

Dental caries in children

(c) Worse than the target set:

Low birth weight

Unmanaged refective error in people with learning disability

Untreated hearing deficit in people with learning disability

Side effects of psychotropic medication in people with learning disability

Deaths from road traffic accidents ages 15 to 24

Smoking in teenage children

Overweight and obesity

Physical exercise

Alcohol consumption

Deaths from suicide in men

Deaths from asthma under the age of 45

Treatment of decayed teeth in children

Consumption of sweets and cakes in teenage children.

General Practitioners

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of GP registrars on the GP training scheme, by *(a)* available places and *(b)* places filled in each training centre. [2644]

Mr. Hague: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of the reply in the Library of the House.

US Military Bases

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what reports his Department obtained from the United States Government regarding the conducting of environmental compliance assessments at military bases used by United States forces in Wales. [3282]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None. This is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Qualifications

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of young people qualified in the last available year to level 3; and what comparison he has made with the percentages qualifying at a similar level in *(a)* England, and *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* each member of the European Union. [3040]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Information on the percentage of young people who qualified to national vocational qualification level 3 in the last available year is not readily available. However the labour force survey for winter 1995–96 estimated that 45 per cent. of 21 to 23-year-olds in Wales were qualified to national vocational qualification level 3, advanced GNVQ or the academic equivalent of two GCE A-levels. The corresponding percentages for England and Scotland were 45 and 52 per cent. respectively, but this information is not readily available for each member of the European Union.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what percentage of students achieved grades A to C at A-level in 1996; and what assessment he has made of how this percentage compares with *(a)* England and *(b)* the equivalent qualifications in Scotland; [3037]

(2) what percentage of students achieved A to C grades in GCSEs in 1996; and what assessment he has made of how this compares *(a)* with England and *(b)* with the equivalent qualification in Scotland. [3036]

Mr. Evans: I intend to publish information on examination results for 1996 in school and college performance booklets later this month.

Copies of the booklets will be sent to the hon. Member, and further copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

Booklets containing similar information will also be published for England and Scotland.

SSR Budgets

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he has in place to ensure that local education authority service, strategy and regulation budgets are not transferred to local education authority-maintained schools in the form of in-year payments. [3079]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 4 November, *Official Report,* column *353.* Were a local education authority to delegate this money to any of its schools, it would be identified in the audit of the financial statements that LEAs are required to prepare under section 122 of the Education Act 1996. Where it could be demonstrated that this had implications for the funding of grant-maintained schools, steps would be taken to ensure that they were not financially disadvantaged.

Arable Area Payments Scheme

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by county the payments made under the arable area payments scheme in 1995. [3622]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information is given in the table:

	Simplified scheme	*Main scheme*					
County	*Total payments* £	*Cereal payments* £	*Oilseed payments* £	*Protein payments* £	*Linseed payments* £	*Set-aside payments* £	*Total* £
Clwyd	800,026.12	675,097.78	88,816.01	50,314.77	3,795.78	174,216.20	992,240.54
Dyfed	1,806,674.34	1,522,674.79	261,232.71	57,839.70	70,928.34	421,522.09	2,334,197.63
Gwent	481,924.24	849,302.56	131,540.54	66,516.21	81,400.52	246,686.02	1,375,445.85
Gwynedd	335,677.34	199,583.92	14,753.47	6,289.57	0.00	67,683.53	288,310.49
Mid Glamorgan	86,467.20	238,594.61	55,767.44	11,111.69	12,859.21	58,510.28	376,843.23
Powys	703,938.20	793,113.14	105,049.37	17,467.83	343.70	184,646.26	1,100,620.30
South Glamorgan	175,555.78	580,217.37	121,566.30	7,453.30	46,668.09	145,344.22	901,249.28
West Glamorgan	126,012.48	80,950.71	11,562.34	0.00	8,129.54	33,737.69	134,380.28
Total	4,516,275.70	4,939,534.88	790,288.18	216,993.07	224,125.18	1,332,346.29	7,503,287.60

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the maximum, minimum and average payment made under the arable area payments scheme in 1995. [3623]

Mr. Evans: The maximum payment was £135,569, the minimum payment £140, and the average payment £4,909.

HEALTH

NHS Funding

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the outturn figures for each district health authority in respect of revenue and capital expenditure for each year since 1992; and what were the revenue and capital allocations. [1125]

Mr. Horam: Under the National Health Service Act 1977, health authorities are required to keep only total attributable expenditure within the sums allotted by my hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Health authorities may spend more on revenue or capital provided providing this is contained within the overall cash limit. That may give rise to anomalies when revenue and capital are considered separately. Additional columns have therefore been provided in a table on the comparison of spending with cash limits, to record the overall position on cash limits. Copies of this table have been placed in the Library.

Dentists

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists are now contracted for national health service work; and how many of them handle only children and exempt categories for national health service work. [1361]

Mr. Malone: The information is contained in the following table:

General dental service: number of dentists[1, 3, 4] who have received payment for national health service treatment from May 1996 to October 1996, and the number [3, 4] receiving no payment for treatment involving a patient charge

England

	Number of dentists[1] who received payment May–October 1996	*Number of dentists[2, 3, 4] who received no payment for treatment attracting a patient charge*
May 1996–October 1996	15,738	658

[1] This is the number of dentists who received a payment schedule in respect of an adult or child patient in the last six months rather than the number who have carried out NHS treatment during this time.

[2] There are a small number of treatments which do not attract a patient charge even for charge payers.

[3] The above figures exclude dentists whose payment schedule was either nil or negative.

[4] The number of dentists in this column includes orthodontists whose practices focus solely on children.

Salaried dentists are excluded.

Nottingham District Health Authority

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of Sheffield Centre for Health and Related Research's report on the funding of health districts; and if he will make a statement on its conclusion regarding Nottingham district health authority. [1421]

Mr. Horam: The report provides no major new insights into the funding of Nottingham health authority.

Car Leasing Costs

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the NHS spent on leasing cars for use by NHS managers in the latest year for which figures are available. [2579]

Mr. Malone: This information is not collected centrally.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will collate information on how many persons are covered by private medical insurance; and if he will make a statement. [2740]

Mr. Horam: The Association of British Insurers already collates this information.

Mentally Disordered Offenders

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mentally disordered offenders are currently receiving treatment in each health authority area; how many are estimated to have received treatment in each health authority area in each year since 1991; of these, how many have received or are receiving care in *(a)* private and *(b)* NHS facilities; and at what cost in each health authority area. [2659]

Mr. Burns: Information available centrally relates to admissions of mentally disordered offenders. National data are published in the Statistical Bulletin "In-patients formally detained in hospitals under the Mental Health Act 1983 and other legislation, England: 1989–90 and 1994–95", copies of which are available in the Library; data will be published shortly giving information at trust level for 1994–95. Reliable information on numbers of mentally disordered offenders in hospital at any given time is not available centrally. Information about the costs in each health authority is not held centrally.

Agency and Bank Nurses

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of *(a)* agency and *(b)* bank nurses currently employed by NHS trusts; and what is the average weekly cost of one of each to a trust. [2661]

Mr. Horam: There were 5,560 whole-time equivalent agency nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff employed in national health service trusts and 14,730 whole-time equivalent bank nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff employed by NHS trusts at September 1995—the latest date for which figures are available. The average weekly cost of an agency nurse and bank nurse to an NHS trust is not available centrally.

Adoption

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to amend the law in respect of contact between adults after adoption to enable the birth parent to have information identifying the adoptee once the adoptee is aged over 25 years; and if he will make a statement. [2720]

Mr. Burns: The Adoption Act 1976 as amended by the Children Act 1989 introduced the Adoption Contact Register. The Adoption Contact Register, which is

operated by the Registrar General, enables adopted people, their birth parents and other relatives to be put in touch with each other when that is the wish of the parties concerned. The register is open to people who are at least 18 years of age. Proposals contained in the draft Adoption Bill make no changes to these arrangements.

Day Care (Yorkshire)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision he has made in *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* South Yorkshire to support school leavers with physical disabilities with day care facilities. [2678]

Mr. Burns: The latest figures available, from September 1995, show that, in South Yorkshire, 1,430 day centre places were available for those aged 16 to 64 with physical and/or sensory impairments. In Doncaster, 197 day centre places were available to the same client group.

Hepatitis C

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many haemophiliacs have been infected with hepatitis C. [2761]

Mr. Horam: The figure of just over 3,000 for haemophiliacs infected with hepatitis C through blood products which has been quoted by the Haemophilia Society is substantially in line with the Department's own estimates.

Prescribed Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* diuretics, *(b)* analgesics, *(c)* night sedations, *(d)* digoxins, *(e)* non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, *(f)* laxatives, *(g)* corticosteroids, *(h)* beta blockers, *(i)* beta agonists, *(j)* long-acting nitrates and *(k)* aminophyllines have been prescribed to people in the United Kingdom broken down by age bands of 10 years in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [2882]

Mr. Malone: Information on the number of prescription items listed alphabetically within therapeutic class for England 1995 is available in a publication entitled "Prescription Cost Analysis, England, 1995", copies of which are available in the Library. For previous years' data, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 18 June, at column *415*.

Questions relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland respectively.

Motor Neurone Disease

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made in the treatment of motor neurone disease; and if he will make a statement. [2878]

Mr. Horam: A new drug called riluzole is, so far, the only treatment shown to slow the progression of one type of motor neurone disease. Other drugs to treat motor neurone disease are currently undergoing clinical investigation. The national health service and local social services authorities assist sufferers from motor neurone disease through symptom control and by provision of services such as speech and language therapy and domiciliary support.

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the methods of treatment of motor neurone disease in the United States of America; and if he will make a statement. [2879]

Mr. Horam: Riluzole was available in the United States of America before the marketing authorization in Europe was granted. The assessment of riluzole, to determine its availability in Europe, was undertaken by the United Kingdom licensing authority on behalf of the European Medicines Evaluation Agency.

Prodigy Pilot Study

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to review the prescribing recommendations in the Prodigy pilot study in respect of people with epilepsy who experience adverse reactions to no-branded medicines; and if he will make a statement; [3292]

(2) what representations he has received from *(a)* pharmaceutical manufacturers, *(b)* patient groups and *(c)* general practitioners regarding the prescribing recommendations in the Prodigy pilot study; [3296]

(3) what plans he has to review the prescribing recommendations in the Prodigy pilot study relating to the treatment of hypertension; and if he will make a statement; [3289]

(4) what plans he has to review the prescribing recommendations in the Prodigy pilot study in respect of people with diabetes requiring animal-based insulins; and if he will make a statement. [3291]

Mr. Malone: The Prodigy project encourages comment from general practitioners taking part in a trial. Following publication of the guidelines used for phase 1 of the project, we have received a number of detailed comments from the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry and from patient groups. Any appropriate revisions to the recommendations will be made in the light of this information.

Hospital Doctors

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors were employed in hospitals *(a)* at the latest available date *(b)* five years ago; and to what extent the change in numbers is accounted for by reductions in junior doctor's hours. [3277]

Mr. Malone: Information on the number of hospital doctors is published in the Department of Health's Statistical Bulletin "Hospital, Public Health and Community Health Service Medical and Dental Staff in England 1985 to 1995", copies of which are available in the Library. The overall increase between 1990 and 1995 was 6,760 doctors, a rise of 14 per cent. Between June 1991 and March 1996, the Government-funded centrally 1,339 extra posts for hospital doctors, including 1,125

consultants, to support the reductions in junior doctors' hours.

Genetic Testing

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action the Advisory Committee on Genetic Testing has taken since July 1996. [3682]

Mr. Horam: The Advisory Committee on Genetic Testing met in July and in September. The committee has established two sub–groups, one on genetic testing offered direct to the public, and another on the issue of late onset genetic disorders.

The chairman of the advisory committee, the Rev. Dr. John Polkinghorne, has today written to professional, consumer, voluntary and industrial bodies requesting comments on a draft voluntary code of practice on genetic testing offered direct to the public. Copies of the document have been placed in the Library.

Pressure Sores

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the letter of 23 July from the Minister for Social Security and Disabled Persons and other Ministers to Hon. Members, if he will make a statement on the campaign to increase public and professional awareness of pressure sores; and if he will collate statistics in respect of the incidence of pressure sores among NHS hospital patients. [1414]

Mr. Burns: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to him on 22 May 1996, column *217* about the collating of statistics on the incidence of pressure sores among national health service patients.

The Department has undertaken a number of recent initiatives on pressure sores. I refer the right hon. Member to the letter my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to him on 29 October 1996 on this subject.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what sums his Department has devoted to the prevention of pressure sores in constant prices for each of the last 10 years; and what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated in this area in this period. [1409]

Mr. Burns: Complete information about expenditure on the prevention of pressure sores by the Department of Health is not available.

To help clarify the cost of pressure sores, the Department commissioned a report in 1993 from Touche Ross. The report found that there may be some small opportunity cost savings to be made for the high–risk patient groups but pressure sore prevention should be seen as a quality of care issue rather than a means of cost savings.

The Department of Health commissioned work to produce clinical guidelines for pressure sores in 1994. The Royal College of Nursing has been asked to redevelop the work so far.

The health technology assessment programme has commissioned a systematic review into wound care management, including pressure sore prevention. The project is on–going, with further expenditure expected this year and next.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health is he will make a statement on the cases investigated by the Health Commissioner in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96 relating to bed sores; and what impact the commissioner's findings have had on the work of his Department. [1408]

Mr. Burns: A number of cases investigated by the Health Service Commissioner in 1994–95 and 1995–96 involved, among other things, issues relating to pressure sores. Where the commissioner made recommendations as part of his investigation reports, the national health service bodies concerned have acted on these.

Epilepsy

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what sums *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Medical Research Panel have devoted to research into (i) epilepsy and (ii) related conditions in the last 10 years in constant prices. [1410]

Mr. Burns: Information on research commissioned by the Department of Health is contained in "The Centrally Commissioned Research Programme" and "The Centrally Commissioned Research Programme: Commissions in 1994–95", copies of which are available in the Library.

Within the national programme on implementation of research findings, there is a project looking at comparing a patient-held reminder card to a doctor-held reminder card to improve epilepsy care in the community. This is at a cost of £102,000.

There are also a number of regionally supported research projects. We do not have complete records on regional research activity but we are aware of the following:

A pilot project aimed to develop and evaluate the role of a nurse specialist delivering a package of information, advice and counselling to patients with newly diagnosed epilepsy at a cost of £50,000.

Collaborative care planning health outcomes contract which includes a collaborative care plan for epilepsy, which is a patient focused approach to planning care at a cost of £15,000.

The identification of the relationship between function and anatomy using 3-D fusion of SECT nuclear medicine and CT medical images which many facilitate the improvement of diagnosis and classification of brain disorders such as dementia and epilepsy at a cost of £45,000.

The Medical Research Council expenditure figures for epilepsy up to 1993–94 are:

1986–87: £437,000

1987–88: £446,000

1988–89: £350,000

1989–90: £310,000

1990–91: £340,000

1991–92: £381,000

1992–93: £336,000

1993–94: £472,000

The Medical Research Council databasing system has now changed and figures for later years cannot be accurately compared with these earlier figures. However, the MRC currently supports a wide portfolio of epilepsy-related research both through its own establishments and through grant support in universities, as follows:

Ten programmes and projects related to epilepsy, for which the total MRC funding is £4,277,000;

Five further projects of relevance to epilepsy, for which total MRC funding is £377,000;

A large programme directly related to epilepsy, for which total MRC expenditure was £940,000, was completed in January 1996.

Incontinence

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated in relation to incontinence in the last 10 years. [1411]

Mr. Burns: The national health service research and development strategy was launched in April 1991. It is not possible conclusively to confirm the costs designated for research on incontinence before this date.

The following research has been funded by the Department of Health policy research programme:

(i) 1988–89: Total cost £40,385

An evaluation of incontinence training packages

Social policy research unit, university of York.

(ii) 1990–91: Total costs £11,000

Further analysis of Office of Population Censuses and Survey's disability survey data on incontinence

Social policy research unit, university of York.

(iii) 1991–93: Total cost £90,000

The current and future role of continence advisors.

(iv) 1993–96: Total cost £181,745

Costs, effectiveness and quality in continence services

Social policy unit and centre for health economics, university of York.

(v) 1993–96: Total cost £251,183

DH post doctoral fellowship: Dr. Brenda Roe to evaluate health interventions by members of the primary health care team and continence advisory services.

(vi) 1994–95: Total cost £99,819

The development of methodologies to identify urinary incontinence and set targets for health gain.

Health and community care research unit, university of Liverpool

(vii) 1995–96: Total cost £13,000

The health technology assessment programme—a review into the use of laxatives by the elderly, and the effects on incontinence.

National health service centre for review and dissemination, university of York.

(viii) To be completed 1997: Total cost £96,000

Research into the treatment of urinary incontinence in stroke patients. University department of medicine for the elderly, university of Leicester.

(ix) To be completed 1997: Total cost £84,500

The development of an improved re-usable incontinence bed pad. The medical physics and bio-engineering department, university College, London.

NB: The costs quoted above (Nos. 1 to 4) for research projects within the social policy research unit are likely to be significantly under estimated as the costs quoted are project related costs only and do not include other unit costs such as staff costs.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list his Department's budget relating to incontinence for each of the last 10 years in constant prices. [1412]

Mr. Burns: The Department of Health funds several voluntary organisations through section 64 grants and has run publicity campaigns relating to incontinence since 1993–94.

The table shows that the total amount spent over the last 10 years is £824,126, which does not include research projects, staffing or administration costs.

Section 64 grant and related expenditure on incontinence 1987–88–1996–97

Year	*Section 64 grant payments*			*Expenditure relating to section 64 grants*			*Total*
	Continence foundation £	*ERIC*[1] *£*	*InconTact £*	*Disabled living Manchester £*	*Communications budget*[2] *£*	*Publicity budget £*	*£*
1987–88	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1988–89	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1989–90	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1990–91	—	10,000	—	—	—	—	10,000
1991–92	—	—	—	—	—	-	—
1992–93	26,250	30,000	—	—	—	—	56,250
1993–94	60,000	23,496	—	—	—	114,076	197,572
1994–95	85,000	10,000	—	—	—	69,559	164,559
1995–96	85,000	38,000	25,000	—	[2]15,300	49,953	213,253
1996–97	75,000	26,492	25,000	16,000	—	40,000	182,492
Total	331,250	137,988	50,000	16,000	[2]15,300	273,588	824,126

[1] Enuresis resource and information centre.

[2] This expenditure was incurred to produce the incontinence report in conjunction with the Royal College of Physicians.

NB: The costs quoted above are likely to be significantly under estimated as they are project related and do not include other unit costs e.g. core staff costs.

Hearing Impairment Aids

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent by his Department on aids for those with hearing impairments in each of the last 10 years at constant prices. [1413]

Mr. Burns: The purchase and supply of hearing aids is a matter for national health service trusts. Information on the cost of provision is not available centrally.

Fetal Sentience

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the membership, terms of reference and proposed timetable for action of the working party on fetal sentience established by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. [3310]

Mr. Horam: The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists is establishing a working party to conduct an independent review of the evidence relating to fetal awareness and to consider whether there is any need for change in current practice. I understand that the college will be announcing shortly the chairman and membership of the working party, along with its full terms of reference.

Cystic Fibrosis Trust

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 4 November, *Official Report*, columns *403–04*, if he will make a statement on the purposes for which each of the three three-year section 64 project grants has been given to the Cystic Fibrosis Trust. [3071]

Mr. Horam: The grants were for the following purposes:

Family support project (1990–1993): to establish a national network of volunteer family support workers responsible for befriending parents of newly diagnosed children, providing practical help and advice, encouraging the development of home care and providing information about welfare benefits.

Family and adult support volunteer network (1993–1996): to devise and provide a programme of mutual support activities for young adults with cystic fibrosis that would enable them to make the difficult transition from childhood to adulthood and support their efforts to obtain employment and live independently of their parents.

Cystic fibrosis advocacy project (1996–1999): to demonstrate that the best advocates of the needs of people with chronic illnesses are the patients themselves, by training adults with cystic fibrosis in four areas to become advocates for others.

Mr. John Greetham

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what appointments Mr. J. Greetham *(a)* holds and *(b)* has held within the NHS, with their dates; and which (i) Minster and (ii) regional chair signed the letter of appointment in each case. [3082]

Mr. Malone: I refer the Hon. Member to the reply I gave on 29 March, columns *778–79*. The further information requested is an follows:

Post	*From*	*To*	*Appointment letter signatory*
Regional Chairman for the Northern and Yorkshire Region of the NHS Executive	1 April 1996	31 March 1998	Stephen Dorrell
Chairman, Northern and Yorkshire Regional Health Authority	1 April 1994	31 March 1996	Virginia Bottomley
Chairman, St. James' University Hospital NHS Trust	17 December 1990	31 March 1994	William Waldegrave
Non-executive member, York District Health Authority	1990	1990	Sir Bryan Askew
Non-executive member and later Vice–Chairman, Yorkshire Regional Health Authority	1984	1990	—
Non-executive member, Scarborough District Health Authority	1980	1984	—
Non-executive member, North Yorkshire Family Practitioner Committee	1978	1980	—

Information about the signatories of the appointment before 1990 is not available.

BSE and CJD

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what evidence his Department has evaluated connecting cases of BSE with cases of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease; [3069]

(2) what evidence his Department has evaluated indicating the BSE *(a)* can be and *(b)* has been transmitted to humans. [3070]

Mr. Horam: The main evidence has been the report of the new variant cases of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease published in *The Lancet* on 6 April 1996, Professor Collinge's work on transgenic mice published in *Nature* on 21 December 1995 and the report of Professor Collinge's glycoprotein mapping experiments published in *Nature* on 24 October 1996.

We have sought advice on these and on related work from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, which provides independent scientific advice on transmissible spongiform encephalopathies.

SEAC's view is that a connection between exposure to bovine spongiform encephalopathy and new variant CJD has not yet been conclusively established. In the absence of any alternative explanation, exposure to BSE remains the most likely explanation and Professor Collinge's latest work provides further support for that view.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 November, *Official Report*, columns *498–500* on tuberculosis cases, how many cases of *(a)* chemoprophylaxis and *(b)* tuberculosis including chemoprophylaxis have been recorded in England in each of the last 10 years. [3528]

Mr. Horam: The figures in the following table give the number of cases of tuberculosis chemoprophylaxis in England which have been notified to the Office for National Statistics, and the number of all notifications of tuberculosis in England, including those notified as

chemoprophylaxis. Cases of tuberculosis chemoprophylaxis are not cases of actual tuberculosis and most are therefore not notified.

Year	*Notifications of cases of tuberculosis chemoprophylaxis in England*	*All notifications of tuberculosis (including chemoprophylaxis) in England*
1986	643	6,386
1987	434	5,287
1988	265	5,225
1989	375	5,598
1990	346	5,356
1991	456	5,726
1992	552	6,149
1993	579	6,300
1994	482	5,891
1995	458	5,884

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Women Priests

35. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, how much compensation the commissioners expect to be paid to clergy leaving the Church due to the ordination of women priests. [1340]

Mr. Alison: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) earlier today.

Forestry Commission Woodlands

Mr. Bayley: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will list those woodlands by county sold off by the Forestry Commission over which the Church Commissioners retained rights and regarding which the Church Commissioners were consulted prior to the sale for each year since 1981. [2409]

Mr. Alison: High Plumps wood, a 20-acre wood on the York estate in the county of Yorkshire leased to the Forestry Commission, was sold to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in 1991 as part of the site for the Central Scientific Laboratory. The Forestry Commission surrendered its lease and the commissioners retained the mineral rights.

Repton Shrubs, a 118-acre woodland on the Foremarke estate in the county of Derbyshire was sold by the commissioners in 1993 subject to a tenancy of 999 years to the Forestry Commission. The site was sold subject to existing rights of way, wayleaves and easements and included the sporting rights, subject to the existing sporting lease.

Details of other relevant sites which have been sold are not currently available, but I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as they are available.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will list those woodlands by county currently owned or leased by the Forestry Commission in respect of which the Church Commissioners have (i) third party rights and (ii) own the freehold. [2410]

Mr. Alison: The Commissioners own the freehold of the following woodlands which are leased to the Forestry Commission:

County	*Name*	*Acreage*
Cambridgeshire	Salome Wood, Leighton Bromswold	58.09
Derbyshire	Foremarke Estate Woods	290.48
Staffordshire	Bishop's Wood Plantation	869.48
Yorkshire	Ampleforth and York Forests (which includes Hagg Wood); Kilburn and Sand Hutton Woods	646.40
Yorkshire	Millington Wold	50.17
Yorkshire	World's End, Stockton on Forest	52.15
Yorkshire	Cawood and Wistow Woods	786.15
Total		2,752.92

Land Rights

Mr. Bayley: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what policy the Church Commissioners have regarding *(a)* the development and *(b)* the commercial exploitation of shooting over land (i) in its ownership and (ii) for which it has retained the shooting rights. [2411]

Mr. Alison: The commissioners have a duty to try to obtain the best possible return from all their assets for the benefit of the Church of England clergy. Sporting rights are let, following negotiations, either to farm tenants or third parties and are subject to regular review.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what mechanism the Church Estate Commissioners adopt to resolve conflicts arising between public access on foot and the commercial exploitation or sale of shooting rights over land or woodland (i) which they own and (ii) over which they have retained the shooting rights. [2412]

Mr. Alison: The commissioners are not seeking any change whatsoever to the existing public rights of access to their woodlands. It is the commissioners' policy to protect any access to these woodlands in the form of public footpaths or bridleways.

We have had no reports of any conflicts between walking and shooting rights and no such concerns have been expressed direct to us. We are always ready to listen to those who contact us over the use of our land.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Deregulation

11. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the effects of the Government's deregulation policies on safety at work. [1310]

Mr. Freeman: Changes are being made which will simplify and clarify the law without reducing necessary standards. These stem from the Health and Safety Commission's own review of regulation.

13. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions he has had with other Ministers regarding deregulation. [1312]

Mr. Freeman: The Deputy Prime Minister meets regularly with ministerial colleagues to discuss the progress of the deregulation initiative.

Small Businesses

12. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the EU directives and regulations implemented in the parliamentary Session 1995–96 which have contributed to a diminution of the regulatory burdens of small businesses in Britain. [1311]

Mr. Freeman: I share my hon. Friend's concern about the potential burdens that new regulations can place on small businesses. This is a message I continue to emphasise to the European Commission and to colleagues in other member states.

I am pleased to note the recent announcement that the number of new proposals for legislation from the Commission has fallen yet again, from 48 in 1993 to just 16 for 1997.

Debts (Late Payment)

14. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received relating to Government policy on the late payment of debts. [1313]

18. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the presentation of Government policy with particular reference to the impact of late payment of debt on British companies' competitiveness. [1318]

Mr. Freeman: The Government have actively sought views on late payment, through specific consultation and through the your business matters series of conferences. We are taking these views into account in determining the best way forward.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

15. **Mr. Brian David Jenkins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the change since 1992 in the proportion of public budgets administered by non-departmental public bodies. [1314]

Mr. Willetts: The proportion of general government expenditure administered by NDPBs in 1991–92 was 4.4 per cent., and in 1994–95 it was 6 per cent. This was primarily due to increased programme expenditure made through a small number of such bodies providing important public services, like the Legal Aid Board, Housing Corporation and higher and further education funding councils.

16. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on non-departmental public bodies. [1315]

Mr. Willetts: The Government continue to reduce the number of non-departmental public bodies and improve the efficiency of those that remain.

Civil Service

17. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many people are currently employed in the civil service. [1317]

22. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many people are currently employed in the civil service. [1325]

Mr. Willetts: In 1979, when we came to office, there were 735,000 civil servants. There are now 492,000: a fall of 33 per cent.

Government Openness

19. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what new initiatives he plans to take to increase the openness of central Government. [1319]

Mr. Freeman: I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) earlier today.

Public Bodies

20. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the responses received to the consultation paper published by his Department on propriety and accountability issues in public bodies. [1322]

Mr. Willetts: We shall announce our conclusions in a White Paper early next year.

Government Policies

21. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his role in co-ordinating Government policies. [1324]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I chair the ministerial committee on the co-ordination and presentation of Government policy and work with my colleagues to build on this Government's unprecedented record in improving competitiveness and achieving economic success.

Information Technology Projects

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how many information technology projects in the Office of Public Service have been undertaken since 1992 and are planned for the coming year, in cost bands of £1,000,000, starting at £0 to £1,000,000; [1900]

(2) to ask the Minister without Portfolio how many information technology projects have been undertaken at his office since his appointment. [2030]

Mr. Willetts *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* For these purposes, my answer includes 10 Downing street and the office of my right hon. Friend the Minister without Portfolio. It includes details of expenditure on information technology projects incurred since 1992 by the Cabinet Office, the Office of Public Service and Science and its successor from July 1995, the Office of Public Service, and their agencies.

The numbers of information technology projects undertaken since 1992 in cost bands of £1,000,000, are as follows:

£0 to £1,000,000 = 98

£1,000,000 to £2,000,000 = 5

£2,000,000 to £3,000,000 = 1

£3,000,000 to £4,000,000 = 1

Seven projects, all of value less than £1,000,000 are presently planned for 1997–98.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster under what circumstances his Department issues central guidance to other Departments answering parliamentary questions; what changes there have been to this guidance in the past year; and if he will make a statement. [2927]

Mr. Freeman: My Department issued "Guidance to Officials on Drafting Answers to Parliamentary Questions" earlier this month. This new guidance, which takes account of helpful comments made by the Public Service Committee on an earlier draft, is as follows:

1. Never forget Ministers' obligations to Parliament which are set out in "Questions of Procedure for Ministers":

"Ministers must not knowingly mislead Parliament and the public and should correct any inadvertent errors at the earliest opportunity. They must be as open as possible with Parliament and the public, withholding information only when disclosure would not be in the public interest, which should be decided in accordance with relevant statute and the Government's "Code of Practice on Access to Government Information."

"Ministers ... have a duty ... to give Parliament ... and the public as full information as possible about the policies, decisions and actions of the Government, and not to deceive or mislead Parliament and the public."

2. It is a civil servant's responsibility to Ministers to help them fulfil those obligations. It is the Minister's right and responsibility to decide how to do so. Ministers want to explain and present Government policy and actions in a positive light. They will rightly expect a draft answer that does full justice to the Government's position.

3. Approach every question predisposed to give relevant information fully, as concisely as possible and in accordance with guidance on disproportionate cost. If there appears to be a conflict between the requirement to be as open as possible and the requirement to protect information whose disclosure would not be in the public interest, you should check to see whether it should be omitted in accordance with statute (which takes precedence) or the "*Code of Practice on Access to Government Information*", about which you should consult your departmental openness liaison officer if necessary.

4. Do not omit information sought merely because disclosure could lead to political embarrassment or administrative inconvenience.

5. Where there is a particularly fine balance between openness and non-disclosure, and when the draft answer takes the latter course, this should be explicitly drawn to the Minister's attention. Similarly, if it is proposed to reveal information of a sort which is not normally disclosed, this should be explicitly drawn to Ministers' attention.

6. If you conclude that material information must be withheld and the PQ cannot be fully answered as a result, draft an answer which makes this clear and which explains the reasons in equivalent terms to those in the Code of Practice, or because of disproportionate cost or the information not being available. Take care to avoid draft answers which are literally true but likely to give rise to misleading inferences.

Century Date Change (Computers)

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment he has made of the cost effects of the millennium date change on the computer systems operated by his Department. [2610]

Mr. Willetts *[holding answer 5 November 1996]:* Whilst the millennium effect on computer systems generally may be significant, within the Cabinet Office and its agencies this effect is likely to be minimal.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Hon. Members' Activity Reports

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will introduce provisions to enable hon. Members to send twice-yearly reports of their activities to each of their constituents at the House's expense; and if he will make a statement. [1988]

Mr. Newton: I have no such plans.

Leader of the Opposition

Mr. Luff: To ask the Lord President of the Council what resources from public funds are available to the Leader of the Opposition, additional to those available to other hon. Members, to enable him to *(a)* run his office and *(b)* deal with correspondence. [2186]

Mr. Newton: Public funds are made available, under the terms of the resolution of the House of 4 November 1993, to assist the official Opposition in carrying out its parliamentary business.

The Leader of the Opposition certifies that expenditure has been incurred in accordance with that resolution and the Fees Office makes payments to the Labour party on a monthly basis. Details in respect of the office costs and correspondence are a matter for the Opposition.

There are of course similar arrangements in respect of other parties in the House, as defined in the above resolution, apart from the party in government.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

World Food Summit

28. **Mr. Brian David Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions he has had with development non-governmental organisations regarding the forthcoming world food summit; and if he will make a statement. [1333]

30. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who will represent the United Kingdom at the world summit in Rome. [1335]

Dr. Liam Fox: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development will represent the United Kingdom at the world food summit in Rome.

The ODA has held extensive consultations with NGOs. It organised, with an independent moderator, a public consultation in July at which Her Majesty's Government's

policy towards the summit was explained and the views of NGOs and other interest groups sought. The ODA has also held frequent discussions over the last year with an umbrella group of non-governmental organisations.

Child Labour

29. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent proposals he has made to eliminate child labour in developing countries. [1334]

Dr. Liam Fox: The ODA has recently approved funding for two initiatives: an International Labour Organisation research programme to combat trafficking in children and exploitation in prostitution and other forms of child labour in Asia; and, a series of workshops organised by a network of NGOs involved in child labour issues in Asia.

SCOTLAND

Dounreay Nuclear Plant

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will arrange for the Atomic Energy Authority nuclear establishment at Dounreay to publish an inventory of the contents of the on-site shaft used for radioactive and other waste disposal. [2639]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 4 November 1996]:* I have been asked to reply.

A copy of the inventory published in 1988 was placed in the Library of the House in December 1995. In addition, I am advised by the UKAEA that the inventory is now computer based and can be viewed on request at the Dounreay site.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of school leavers in Scotland have been vaccinated against tuberculosis; and if he will make a statement. [1562]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: BCG vaccination has been offered to schoolchildren in Scotland since 1953. In more recent years, the target age group has been 12 to 13 years. Statistical information about the numbers of children vaccinated appears in "Scottish Health Statistics 1995" (Table 8.8). In 1995, 97.9 per cent. of children who were tuberculin tested were either vaccinated or tested positive, indicating that they already had immunity and therefore did not require vaccination. My right hon. Friend accepted the recent recommendation of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation that the schools-based BCG vaccination programme should continue.

BSE

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland by what mechanisms his Department is able to identify the cattle assessed as being at risk from BSE which require to be slaughtered under the Florence agreement; how many such cattle there are in Scotland; and what is the minimum practical time scale for completing that accelerated cull in Scotland. [2137]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Data on all herds with confirmed cases of BSE are held at the Central Veterinary Laboratory. This data can be used to identify the herd of birth of BSE cases—and hence animals subject to the same feeding regimes; that is, the birth cohorts. To identify all these at-risk animals, it is necessary to visit the herds of origin, to identify the cohort animals remaining in such herds and finally to determine the present location of cohort animals which have moved to other herds. This involves detailed inspection of records. In May of this year, the CVL made an estimate that a maximum of some 127,000 cohort animals were present on farms in Britain, of which some 4,300 were in Scotland. Given the need for on-farm visits and reference to on-farm records, it is impossible to give a reliable estimate of how long it would take to identify all these animals.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage and total amount of BSE eradication and compensation scheme expenditure has been received by *(a)* farmers, *(b)* slaughterers, *(c)* renderers and *(d)* other recipients; and if he will make a statement. [2161]

Mr. Robertson: Between April and October 1996, the total expenditure on BSE eradiation and compensation schemes broken down by recipient was as follows:

	£ million	*Per cent.*
(a) Farmers	477	68
(b) Slaughterers	97	14
(c) Renderers	78	11
(d) Other Recipients	48	7
	700	

Breast Cancer

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of breast cancer were identified in women aged 65 years and over in each year since 1992; and what proportion they represent of all women diagnosed as having breast cancer. [2397]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table:

Year	*Breast cancer cases in women aged 65 and over*	*Breast cancer cases in women of all ages*	*Women (aged 65+) with breast cancer expressed as a percentage of all women with breast cancer*
1992	1,353	3,240	41.8
1993	1,330	3,111	42.8
1994	1,307	3,074	42.5

Community Care, Tayside

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the report into the provision of community care in Tayside will be presented. [1937]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Angus Skinner, the chief social work inspector, has completed his report on community care services in Angus, Dundee and Perth and Kinross. It will be published on 14 November 1996.

Neonatal and Perinatal Mortality

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the *(a)* neonatal and *(b)* perinatal mortality rates for the last four years by each health board. [2670]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is given in the table.

Mortality rates

	Neonatal				*Perinatal*			
Health board area	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*[1]	*1992*[3]	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*[2]
Scotland	4.6	4.0	4.0	4.0	9.0	9.6	9.0	9.6
Argyll and Clyde	4.6	4.4	5.1	4.3	8.3	11.6	9.3	9.7
Ayrshire and Arran	5.5	3.7	2.1	4.5	9.9	8.3	7.6	12.6
Borders	5.0	—	1.7	2.6	10.0	5.2	6.1	6.8
Dumfries and Galloway	5.7	4.1	6.3	4.3	8.0	9.3	13.1	8.5
Fife	4.2	4.4	4.6	3.5	6.5	9.3	8.7	7.7
Forth Valley	3.5	3.9	1.9	3.8	8.6	10.7	8.4	11.2
Grampian	4.2	3.3	4.4	2.9	9.1	9.1	10.0	6.8
Greater Glasgow	5.3	5.3	4.7	5.2	9.8	9.9	9.5	11.9
Highland	3.0	3.9	2.4	3.3	8.1	9.8	8.4	6.2
Lanarkshire	4.4	4.4	2.7	4.0	11.0	10.1	8.6	10.5
Lothian	5.4	3.3	4.7	4.2	9.7	9.2	8.7	9.3
Orkney	4.2	—	8.0	—	12.4	4.2	15.8	8.6
Shetland	3.1	3.2	3.2	—	—	6.4	3.2	6.8
Tayside	3.3	3.0	4.1	3.2	6.5	9.0	8.1	8.2
Western Isles	3.0	7.1	3.3	3.3	6.0	14.0	16.4	9.9

[1] Deaths in the first four weeks of life, rate per 1,000 live births.
[2] Still-births and deaths in the first week of life, rate per 1,000 live and still-births.
[3] The Still-Birth (Definition) Act 1992 redefined still-births, from 1 October 1992, to include losses between 24 and 27 weeks gestation. The perinatal mortality rates in this table include all still-births registered in 1992.

Thomas Hamilton

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he made of the applicability of the Moorov doctrine for mounting a successful prosecution against Thomas Hamilton for sexual interference with male children. [2995]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am replying on behalf of my learned and noble Friend the Lord Advocate who is responsible for criminal prosecutions in Scotland. With a few minor exceptions, no person can be convicted of a crime or statutory offence in Scotland unless there is evidence of at least two witnesses implicating that person with the commission of the crime or offence with which he is charged. Where, however, the accused is charged with a serious of similar offences, closely linked in time, character and circumstances, in terms of the so-called Moorov doctrine the evidence of single witnesses as to particular offences can be treated as corroborating the evidence of each other. As is clear from paragraph 4.15 of Lord Cullen's report (Cm 3386), there was in fact very little evidence of any acts of indecency on the part of Thomas Hamilton. So far as can be established, no incident amounting to sexual interference with male children was reported to the police while Hamilton was alive. The Lord Advocate informs me that while Thomas Hamilton was alive, the criminal authorities were not in possession of evidence which would have justified a prosecution against Thomas Hamilton for sexual interference with male children.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will investigate the actions of the police and the procurator fiscal in respect of the possible prosecution of Thomas Hamilton for abuse of male children. [2724]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 November 1996]:* The actions of the police in reporting cases and incidents to procurators fiscal were examined by Lord Cullen. The Lord Advocate arranged for an independent senior member of the procurator fiscal service—Mr. Alfred Vannet, the regional procurator fiscal for Grampian, highland and islands—to examine all the relevant case papers and to interview the members of the procurator fiscal service who were responsible for taking decisions in the cases. Mr. Vannet had never worked in the procurator fiscal office involved. He had had no prior involvement in any of the cases. He carried out his review under the supervision of Crown counsel. All the relevant police reports and Mr. Vannet's review, were placed before Lord Cullen's inquiry. Lord Cullen also heard evidence from police officers and from two members of the procurator fiscal service who had dealt with reports concerning Hamilton. Lord Cullen's report (Cmnd 3386) deals with the matter in some detail. Lord Cullen noted—at page 162—that Mr. Vannet's report was thorough and set out a considerable amount of detail. Lord Cullen dealt—in chapter 2 of his report—with the decisions taken by procurators fiscal. In relation to the incident at

Mullarochy bay, Loch Lommond in July 1991, he concluded that there was no basis for his entertaining criticism of the decision taken by the procurator fiscal (para. 4.44). As regards the incident at the residential sports training course in June 1992, he concluded that there was no evidence of any criminal act (para. 4.51). Finally, as regards the complaints about Hamilton in January, May and June 1993, Lord Cullen concluded that the decision not to apply for a warrant to search Hamilton's house was a matter for the discretion of the procurator fiscal. In the light of Lord Cullen's findings, the Secretary of State sees no need for further investigation into the actions of the police in making reports to procurators fiscal; and the Lord Advocate considers that further investigation of the actions of procurators fiscal is unnecessary.

Storm Damage

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide additional resources for local authorities affected by storm damage on 6 November. [3410]

Mr. Kynoch: In the event of severe weather, authorities are expected to bear a certain level of emergency without recourse to central Government assistance. In addition, the Bellwin scheme exists to provide a means by which additional revenue funding may be made available to authorities in certain circumstances. If any council believes that the demands placed on it as a result of the storms of 6 November would justify either the triggering of the scheme or the granting of additional capital consent, then it is open to it to make a case for this to the Scottish Office.

Public Relations

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department spent on *(a)* advertising, *(b)* public relations and *(c)* entertainment in each of the last five financial years. [1275]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 4 November 1996]:* A breakdown of expenditure by my Department is set out in the table:

The Scottish Office

Year	Advertising £	Running costs of The Scottish Office Information Directorate £	Entertainment[1] £
1991–92	1,538,881	1,155,268	83,836
1992–93	1,497,250	1,229,758	[2]125,118
1993–94	1,547,568	1,312,661	76,088
1994–95	1,454,172	1,323,234	79,510
1995–96	1,613,616	1,531,037	[3]82,978

Scottish Prison Service became an agency in April 1993.

[1] These figures include expenditure on hospital by the agencies. To provide a breakdown could be done only at disproportionate cost.

[2] This figure includes expenditure on hospitality during the EC Council Meeting in Edinburgh in December 1992.

[3] In addition, the Scottish Office spend £34,680 on the VE day and VJ day events in Edinburgh in May and August 1995.

Historic Scotland

Year	Advertising £	Press office £	Entertainment £
1991–92	not available	not available	—
1992–93	not available	not available	—
1993–94	269,000	92,160	—
1994–95	280,000	92,430	—
1995–96	293,000	102,400	—

Scottish Prison Service

Year	Advertising £	Communications branch £	Entertainment £
1991–92	—	—	—
1992–93	—	—	—
1993–94	—	—	—
1994–95	—	31,217	—
1995–96	—	60,407	—

TRANSPORT

Railway Closures

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) to whom the duties on the British Railways Board *(a)* to use its best endeavours to ensure that alternative services are provided when railway services are closed and *(b)* to alert the Secretary of State when there is a failure to comply with closure conditions will be passed when the duty to provide rail services passes to a private train operating company; [3313]

(2) if the obligations to retain transport services placed on the British Railways Board as conditions of railway closures will be passed to the Franchising Director to ensure that these obligations are honoured in future by train operating companies winning franchises to provide passenger services. [3312]

Mr. Watts: From time to time in the past, various obligations were placed on British Rail as a condition of approving the enclosure of routes or services. Much more comprehensive obligations are now placed on franchise operators in the form of the contractually binding passenger service requirements—PSRs—which are specified by the Franchising Director in accordance with his objectives, instructions and guidance from the Secretary of State. PSRs are based on the existing British Rail timetable, including those services British Rail is operating to meet obligations relating to past closures. The contractual service obligations the PSRs introduce effectively supersede those which applied previously to British Rail.

Maintenance Work

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current backlog of maintenance work on *(a)* the road network and *(b)* the rail network. [2795]

Mr. Watts: The latest information on the condition of the road network is contained in the national road maintenance condition survey. The notion of a current

backlog cannot be defined in a meaningful way. In the case of the rail network, this is an operational matter for Railtrack.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the rules and regulations he proposes to repeal or amend by means of a reference to the Deregulation Committee before the end of 1996; and if he will make a statement. [3203]

Mr. Bowis: My Department is currently consulting on the following proposals for use of the deregulation order-making power:

Contracting out Civil Aviation Authority computer services by amending the Civil Aviation Act 1982;

Various measures amending the Road Traffic Regulation Act, including a proposal to allow cycle racing on bridleways.

The timing of any reference to the Deregulation Committee will depend on various factors including the outcome of the consultation exercise.

Avon Ring Road

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to ensure the early completion of stage II of the Avon ring road. [3409]

Mr. Watts: The Avon ring road is a local road scheme which is being promoted by South Gloucestershire council who succeeded Avon county council as a result of local government reorganisation. The project was first approved for transport supplementary grant in the 1994–95 local transport capital settlement. The Department of Transport allocated £4 million to the scheme in 1996–97. This funding is conditional on the satisfactory completion of statutory procedures. The Secretaries of State for Transport and for the Environment's decision to confirm the orders and grant the certificates for the Avon ring road on 12 October 1995 are currently the subject of a legal challenge; the dates for the proposed High Court hearing of that challenge are 21 and 22 November. Progress on the scheme will depend on the outcome of that challenge.

Health Professionals (On-duty Car Signs)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding provision of on-duty car signs to non-GP health professionals in the NHS; what plans he has to widen the provision of such signs; and if he will make a statement. [2727]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* There are some schemes under which the police and traffic wardens exercise discretion where doctors and others involved in the provision of emergency or primary health care, such as midwives, are forced to park illegally when making home visits in the course of their work. I understand that local agreements to this effect, recognised by the British Medical Association, but with no formal status in road traffic law, exist in some parts of England and Wales. Participants are issued with a badge for display in their vehicle. The Government receive occasional correspondence on the subject, but are not involved in the establishment of such schemes. Their scope is a matter for local consideration.

Compulsory Purchase Orders

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his recent letter to the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling, which are the clauses in the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill that disapply the provisions of the Compulsory Purchase Act 1965, regarding the serving of blight notices in relation to properties over tunnels. [2909]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* The relevant provisions are set out in paragraph 6(4) of schedule 4 to the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill, which provides that section 8(1) of the Compulsory Purchase Act 1965 is not to apply where the compulsory purchase powers in clause 4(1) of the Bill are exercised only in relation to the subsoil or under-surface of the land.

Section 8(1) of the 1965 Act provides that no one is obliged to sell part of a property if he is willing and able to sell the whole of it, unless the lands tribunal is satisfied that part of the property can be taken without material detriment or without affecting the amenity of the property.

If, after the Bill passes into law, an owner of a property over a tunnel serves a blight notice, the Secretary of State may serve a counter notice claiming that he proposes to acquire part only of the property—the subsoil—and the owner could then refer the matter to the lands tribunal. Although in non-CTRL blight cases, the lands tribunal would have to consider material detriment under section 166(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, that section is disapplied because of the reference to section 166(1) (b) of that Act and section 8(1) of the 1965 Act.

Shadow Toll Payments

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the annual estimated cost to public funds of the shadow toll payments to the successful bidders in respect of tranche 1A let by the Highways Agency. [2010]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 11 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the costs of the four contracts let as Tranche 1A of the Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) programme (A618/A19 Dishforth to Tyne Tunnel DBFO, A30/A35 Exeter to Bere Regis DBFO, A50/A564 Stoke to Derby Link DBFO and M40 Junctions 1 to 15 DBFO).

The following figures illustrate the estimated range of annual cost (over a 5 year period), based on the Highways Agency's forecast of traffic volume for the above four contracts. These figures, which are cash price estimates, will be influenced by the usage of the DBFO road and the performance of the DBFO Company. The figures below do not include additional but relatively minor future lump sum payments covering, for example, archaeological works, which because of their uncertain nature are extremely difficult to estimate.

1996–97: £4 million

1997–98: £43 million

1998–99: £45 million

1999–00: £57 million

2000–01: £76 million

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which Doncaster-based British Rail businesses are in the programme for privatisation; what is the number of employees in each of these businesses; what is the expected date for the sale of each business; and what are the expected receipts from each sale. [2719]

Mr. Watts: Railpart UK Ltd. which has its headquarters in Doncaster, is expected to be sold in about two months. The company employed 272 staff as at 31 March 1996. It would be inappropriate for commercial reasons to speculate on possible receipts.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the date of privatisation of each of the Doncaster-based British Rail businesses which have been privatised to date; what was the number of employees in each business at the time of privatisation; and what was the amount of money received for each business. [2739]

Mr. Watts: The following British Rail businesses, whose headquarters were based in Doncaster, have been sold as at 6 November 1996.

Business sold	*Date sale completed*	*Number of employees at time of sale*	*Gross proceeds (£ million)*
Doncaster Rail Maintenance Ltd.	5 June 1995	575 (on 1 April 1995)	—[1]
BPE Mechanical and Engineering Consultancy Ltd.	15 September 1995	32 (including branch offices)	0.25
Loadhaul Ltd.	24 February 1996	1,659	—[2]

[1] Doncaster Rail Maintenance Ltd. was one of the three former BR Maintenance Ltd. businesses which were sold together for a single lump-sum price.

[2] Loadhaul Ltd. was one of the three former BR trainload freight companies which were sold together for a single lump-sum price.

Road Congestion (North-east)

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will publish his forecasts of future congestion on trunk roads in Yorkshire and the north-east, with particular reference to key links on the motorway network in these regions; [3058]

(2) if he will publish an updated congestion map for the trunk and other main roads in the Yorkshire and Humberside region; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [3059]

Mr. Watts: Maps showing existing and predicted congestion levels on motorways and trunk roads in the Yorkshire, Humberside and north-east regions have been placed in the Library. The Department does not produce similar maps for other main roads.

Traffic Calming

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the advantages of taking further substantial traffic-calming measures in conurbations; and if he will make a statement. [3193]

Mr. John Bowis: My Department is providing £55 million in 1996–97 to fund local authorities' local safety schemes, mostly in urban areas. Many of these schemes involve traffic calming measures, which are very effective at reducing road accident casualties. The recently published transport research laboratory report—number 215—which reviewed traffic calming schemes in 20 mph zones found that accident frequency fell by 60 per cent. Pedestrian casualties fell by 61 per cent. and child pedestrian and child cyclist casualties fell by 67 per cent. There are now about 300 20 mph zones and more are likely to be created. The Department has ring fenced £1 million from within the 1997–98 budget to fund the construction of 20 mph zones specifically targeted at child pedestrian casualties.

It is for local highway authorities to choose whether to introduce further traffic calming measures and 20 mph zones funded from their own resources in addition to those supported by the Department. I am pleased to say that many do so.

Digital Selcall

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the Department of Trade and Industry to ensure British manufacturers are licensed to provide digital selcall radios to the United Kingdom marine market. [2571]

Mr. Bowis: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from R.M. Bradley to Mr. Barry Field, dated 11 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Question about discussions with the Department of Trade and Industry to ensure British manufacturers are licensed to provide Digital Selcall radios to the United Kingdom marine market.

There have been no discussions with the Department of Trade and Industry relating to the licensing of manufacturers of Digital Selcall radios —normally known as digital selective calling equipment. Discussions are ongoing with the Department through the Maritime Radio Technical Committee to develop suitable performance standards for digital selective calling equipment for the United Kingdom marine market. Manufacturers may obtain type approval from the Department of Trade and Industry for digital selective calling equipment designed to the relevant performance standards, approval being granted after consultation with the Marine Safety Agency.

Trans-European Network

Sir Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce his Department's application to the EU for funding for the feasibility study for the rail trans-European network route from Bristol to Plymouth and Penzance; and if he will make a statement. [3457]

Mr. Watts: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him on 16 July *Official Report*, column *440*. We pressed the merits of the UK's TEN bid, including an allocation for a development study of the great western line, at the meeting of the TENs finance committee on 25 July. We now expect a formal Commission decision, in the light of that meeting and subsequent bilateral discussion, to be issued at the end of this month.

Motorway Maintenance Contracts

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will update the information in his answer of 7 June 1995, *Official Report*, columns *232–34*, regarding substructure motorway maintenance contracts administered for his Department by W. S. Atkins and Partners and Maunsell and Partners, to the latest date for which information is available. [2973]

Mr. Watts: An "update" of *Official Report*, 7 June 1995, columns *232–34* regarding substructure motorway maintenance contracts administered by W. S. Atkins and G. Maunsell and Partners is listed as follows.

Contract reference	*Viaduct*	*Contractor*	*Tender sum (£ million)*	*Final account (£ million)*
W. S. Atkins				
R5	Oldbury	R. M. Douglas	0.809	1.040
R33	Wigmore	Trafalgar House	0.586	[1]—
R35	Bescot	Trafalgar House	0.598	[1]—
R53	Oldbury	Taylor Woodrow	2.760	[1]—
R67	Bescot	Curral Lewis Martin	2.000	[1]—
R89	Bescot and Ray Hall	Dean and Dyball	0.701	[1]—
Routine Maintenance Contracts				
V	n/a	R and C Williams	[2]—	1.479
W	n/a	R and C Williams	[2]—	[1]—
G. Maunsell and Partners				
R24	Gravelly Hill	Makers Industrial Ltd.	0.674	[1]—
R60	Bescot and Ray Hall	Shephard Hill	1.396	[1]—

[1] Accounts not finalised.
[2] Schedule of rates contracts.
It is of note the concept of schedule of rates contracts was explained in the Minister's letter of 23 August 1995, reference W/PSO/10345/95.

Train Operating Companies

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of train operating companies operating on the UK rail network are currently owned by foreign companies. [1941]

Mr. Watts: All franchised train operating companies are owned by companies registered in the United Kingdom. The ultimate holding company of Connex Rail Ltd. and of Great North Eastern Railway Company Ltd. is CGEA Group, registered in France, and Sea Containers Ltd. registered in Bermuda, respectively.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the spray suppression procedures for HGVs in (i) the Netherlands and (ii) the United Kingdom. [3094]

Mr. Bowis: No assessment of spray procedures in the Netherlands has been made by the Department of Transport. In the UK, research has been carried out by the transport research laboratory which centred on the measurement of spray and its effect on vision. Whilst the test work has been completed, the assessment of the results is not finished and it is too early to decide if any changes to current vehicle requirements are necessary.

North Wales to Crewe Line

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what evaluation his Department has undertaken of the effect of the imposition of the minimum passenger requirement on the north Wales to Crewe train service; and if he will make a statement. [1863]

Mr. Watts: The passenger service requirement will protect a guaranteed level of service on the north Wales to Crewe line for the first time.

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve the observance of the 30 mph speed limit on urban roads; and if he will make a statement on the proportion of vehicles which exceed the 30 mph speed limit. [2390]

Mr. Bowis: Highway authorities are able to make changes ot the layout of roads through traffic calming to encourage observance of the 30 mph limit. We are considering, as part of the current consultation on road traffic regulation, the possibility of allowing 30 mph repeater signs along lit roads. Enforcement is a matter for the police. Our Kill Your Speed campaign is geared to the message that a great many casualties are caused by motorists travelling too fast—mostly by just a modest amount—in 30 mph limited roads, where two thirds of all road casualties occur.

New Drivers Legislation

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Road Traffic (New Drivers) Act 1995 will come into force. [2786]

Mr. Bowis: We intend to bring this Act into force by mid-1997.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures are proposed to mitigate noise levels along the rail link from Waterloo station to the channel tunnel. [2952]

Mr. Watts: There is no statutory requirement for railway operators to provide noise mitigation on existing railway lines. However, a number of voluntary, jointly funded noise mitigation schemes have been agreed between Railtrack and several London boroughs and local authorities in the south-east. Under these schemes, acoustic barriers, and in some cases secondary glazing, have been installed at certain locations worst affected by noise from existing lines to the channel tunnel. The Government have encouraged and supported these schemes by allocating supplementary credit approvals to the local authorities concerned.

As far as the new channel tunnel rail link is concerned, noise mitigation proposals were set out in the environmental statement that accompanied the CTRL Bill on introduction. Mitigation, at source, rather than relying simply on noise insulation of affected properties, will be provided in connection with the new works—the CTRL itself and the reinstated Gravesend west line. These

proposals will be further developed during the detailed design of the project and will be subject to approval by the local planning authorities along the route of the CTRL.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Shotgun Deaths

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were killed by shotguns over the last five years. [1203]

Sir John Wheeler: The following list shows the number of deaths caused by shotguns in each of the past five years:

	Homicides	*Suicides*	*Accidents*
1991	6	8	—
1992	14	10	—
1993	10	15	—
1994	7	10	—
1995	4	8	2

Permaculture

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to encourage permaculture within national parks in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [2355]

Mr. Moss: Permaculture is a system of natural agriculture, requiring generous mulching, no artificial fertilisers, use of natural resources and only minimal weeding. It is an ecosystem-based method of production, with some similarities to organic methods.

The Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 provides for national parks to be established, but none have been, nor are there any plans to introduce them.

The Secretary of State is recommended to make the following statement:

> There are no plans to encourage permaculture in national parks in Northern Ireland as there are no such parks.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimates he has made of how many farms or holdings are operating on permaculture principles; and if he will make a statement. [2361]

Mr. Ancram: There are no UK registers of farms or holdings operating on permaculture principles. There are 10 UK-registered organic producers in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Trevor Wilson

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the investigation by the chairman of the Police Authority into allegations relating to the conduct of Mr. Trevor Wilson in July. [1990]

Sir John Wheeler: I am content with the manner in which the chairman of the Police Authority dealt with this matter.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the members of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland who decided that Mr. Trevor Wilson's conduct during July required no further action. [1991]

Sir John Wheeler: I am advised by the Police Authority that 12 members, including the chairman and vice-chairman, were present at the special authority meeting held on 30 July. Those attending were Mr. P. J. Armstrong, Professor H. Wallace, Mr. R. Empey, Mr. B. R. Johnston, Mr. T. A. Kerrigan, Mr. W. R. Martin, Mr. S. J. McCammick, Mrs. R. A. McCormick, Mr. J. O. McDonald, Mr. R. A. J. Spence, Mr. T. J. Wilson and one other member who did not wish to be named.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the report of the police investigation into the activities of Mr. Trevor Wilson in July was made available to the Police Authority. [1992]

Sir John Wheeler: I am advised by the Police Authority that the report of the police investigation into Mr. Wilson's involvement in events in Cookstown on 9 and 10 July 1996 was not made available to the Police Authority.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the statement of the Police Authority of 31 July 1995, if he will make a statement on the advice received by the authority that no criminal proceedings were to be taken against Mr. Trevor Wilson. [1993]

Sir John Wheeler: I do not intend to make a statement as the Police Authority for Northern Ireland, having heard from Mr. Wilson on the matter, regards the matter as being closed.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what actions or inquiries were undertaken by the Police Authority for Northern Ireland to establish the truth of allegations about the conduct of Mr. Trevor Wilson in July. [1994]

Sir John Wheeler: Following references in the press to the alleged conduct of authority member, Mr. Trevor Wilson in the Cookstown area on 9 and 10 July 1996, Mr. Wilson spoke to the chairman of the authority and asked for an opportunity to discuss the matter with his fellow members. Subsequently, the authority chairman wrote to the Chief Constable of the RUC about the matter and was advised that no criminal proceedings were to be taken against Mr. Wilson.

During the special authority meeting held on 30 July 1996, Mr. Wilson gave members of the authority a full explanation of his actions and answered a range of forthright questions put to him. Members accepted Mr. Wilson's account of events and agreed that no further action was necessary.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what explanation of his conduct Mr. Trevor Wilson provided to the special meeting of the Police Authority on 30 July; and what factors underlay the decision of the RUC to investigate his conduct. [1996]

Sir John Wheeler: I am advised by the Police Authority that Mr. Wilson gave his explanation of his conduct to the authority at its meeting on 30 July 1996 on the basis that it would remain confidential.

Mr. Wilson was observed by a police officer in close proximity to, but not part of, a group of people who were blocking a road in the Cookstown area on 9 July 1996.

In pursuit of investigations into this activity, Mr. Wilson was interviewed by police. No evidence was disclosed which warranted any further police action.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will instruct the Police Authority to publish the minutes of the special meeting of 30 July. [1997]

Sir John Wheeler: I have no plans to instruct the Police Authority to publish the minutes of the special meeting of 30 July.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he *(a)* called for and *(b)* considered (i) reports of the RUC criminal investigation and (ii) proceedings of the Police Authority on 30 July into the conduct of Mr. Trevor Wilson; and when he consulted the chairman of the Police Authority to discuss the allegations concerning Mr. Trevor Wilson. [1998]

Sir John Wheeler: I had no need to call for the reports specified in the question as I was kept informed of Mr. Wilson's request for a meeting of the authority, the authority's subsequent meeting and its decision that no further action was necessary.

Information Technology Projects

Ms Church: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many information technology projects have been undertaken since 1992, and are planned for the coming year, arranged in cost bands of £1,000,000. [1920]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* The information requested of the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments is listed.

	IT projects undertaken 1992–93 to 1996–97	*IT projects planned 1997–98*[2]
£0–£1 million[1]	81	8
£1 million–£2 million	6	2
£2 million–£3 million	1	—
£3 million–£4 million	1	—
£4 million–£5 million	—	—
£5 million–£6 million	1	—

[1] Includes projects above the general agreement on tariffs and trade threshold on contract value (£108,000).
[2] Excludes the Department of the Environment (NI).

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total cost of the conference on incorporation of the further education colleges held at Slieve Donard hotel, Newcastle on 4 and 5 November; how many people were involved; and by whom the cost was borne. [2728]

Mr. Ancram: The cost of the consultation conference was £12,300 including VAT; 128 delegates from across the sector attended. The cost was borne by the Department of Education.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what work on management information systems will be classified as nugatory if incorporation of further education colleges does not proceed. [2729]

Mr. Ancram: None.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what expenditure the Department of Education planned to incur on commissioning consultants to advise on the adequacy and implementation of college action plans. [2730]

Mr. Ancram: The planned expenditure is up to £80,000.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the additional costs of appointing *(a)* personnel management, *(b)* estate management, and *(c)* financial management and marketing staff as a consequence of the incorporation of further education colleges. [2731]

Mr. Ancram: The Department is currently in negotiation with the education and library boards to determine the level of resources to colleges on incorporation. This will include provision for these additional staffing costs. It will be for the colleges to determine their management structures.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what legislative proposals he has in respect of the RUC in the current parliamentary Session. [2735]

Sir John Wheeler: The following measures in the Police Bill published by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department on 1 November will extend to Northern Ireland:

- the placing of the national criminal intelligence service on a statutory basis;
- the placing of police intrusive surveillance operations on a statutory footing;
- the placing of the police information technology organisation on a statutory basis
- the creation of a criminal records agency.

The Government are continuing work on the proposals set out in the White Paper "Foundations for Policing" (Cm 3249) published in May 1996. However, no timetable has yet been set for the introduction of legislation to implement the White Paper.

Education and Library Boards

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the basis of what criteria he chose the proposed boundaries for each of the new education and library boards. [2738]

Mr. Ancram: I refer the hon. Member to paragraph 7 of my statement of 25 June 1996 on the review of educational administration, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Prisoners

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prisoners in Northern Ireland have applied on compassionate grounds to visit close relatives living in the Republic of Ireland in each of the last five years; how many have *(a)* been allowed and *(b)* been refused; and how may are awaiting decisions. [3302]

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Northern Ireland Prison Service under its chief executive, Mr. Alan Shannon. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alan Shannon to Mr. Max Madden, dated 11 November 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to the Parliamentary Question that you tabled seeking information concerning the numbers of prisoners in Northern Ireland who have applied on compassionate grounds to visit close relatives living in the Republic of Ireland in each of the last 5 years.

The Information that you are seeking is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Records of prisoners seeking periods of temporary release are not maintained in a form that would enable us to identify applications from prisoners whose relatives live outside Northern Ireland.

There are no outstanding applications from prisoners requesting a visit to relatives who reside int he Republic of Ireland.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what regulations his Department proposes to repeal by the end of 1996; if he proposes to conduct a compliance cost assessment on each regulation repealed; and what is the estimated cost of undertaking a compliance cost assessment to determine the advantages and disadvantages of such a repeal. [3441]

Mr. Ancram: A list of the regulations my Department currently proposes to repeal or amend by the end of 1996 has been placed in the Library of the House.

Since the effect in each case will be to reduce, rather than increase, compliance costs, a compliance cost assessment—CCA—is not required. Departments do, however, seek to estimate approximate savings wherever possible. The cost of undertaking a CCA varies from case to case, but is generally modest. Because part of the cost falls on the businesses consulted, a full CCA would be inappropriate for measures designed to reduce business burdens.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

BSE

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by what mechanisms his Department is able to identify the cattle assessed as being at risk from BSE which require to be slaughtered under the Florence agreement; how many such cattle there are in England and Wales; and what is the minimum practical time scale for completing the accelerated cull in England and Wales. [2134]

Mrs. Browning: The Government have announced that it is not proceeding with the selective cull at present until the scientific evidence and options for a certified herd scheme have been considered further. The animals would need to be identified by reference to farm records. It is not possible to say how many animals might be involved, their location, or how long any cull programme might take, until that further analysis has been carried out and a decision taken. The estimated number of animals covered by our original proposals, and the distribution of natal herds, is contained in the UK's eradication plan, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Unlicensed Fishing Vessels

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what steps are being taken to curb the activities of unlicensed fishing vessels operating for profit in United Kingdom waters; [2890]

(2) what information his Department collates on the number of unlicensed fishing vessels operating for profit in United Kingdom waters. [2889]

Mr. Baldry: Vessels fishing for profit must possess a license issued by the fisheries departments in accordance with the Sea Fishing Licensing Order 1992 (SI 1992 No. 2633) (as amended). Checks are carried out to ensure that vessels hold an appropriate licence as part of the surveillance operations carried out by the Ministry's sea fisheries inspectorate and the Royal Navy. There have been three successful prosecutions since the beginning of 1994.

Rabies

Dr. Marek: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the annual costs to owners of *(a)* the present animal quarantine system against rabies and *(b)* a system based on identification and vaccination. [2808]

Mrs. Browning: We estimate that the annual cost to pet owners of the current animal quarantine system is some £11 million.

There are a number of possible systems based on identification and vaccination. These are being considered as part of the review of rabies controls announced in my reply of 5 November 1996 to the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) *Official Report*, column *488*. Any costs associated with these options will be identified during the review.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the cost of rabies prevention and research for the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [2809]

Mrs. Browning: The cost of the present policy to the public purse is estimated at £1.3 million per year. About £0.4 million of this is for research. The remainder covers the costs of inspection of quarantine premises, licensing of imports, laboratory testing of suspect animals and publicity.

Codex Alimentarius Commission

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the names of the British representatives on the Codex Alimentarius Commission together with its *(a)* terms of reference, *(b)* decision-making procedures and *(c)* voting methods. [3102]

Mrs. Browning: The Codex Alimentarius Commission is an intergovernmental body established by the Food and Agriculture Organisation and World Health Organisation

"to guide and promote the elaboration and establishment of definitions and requirements for foods, to assist in their harmonisation and, in doing so, to facilitate international trade".

The commission is assisted in its work by 29 committees. Some deal with general matters, that is labelling; some with specific commodities, that is, fish and fishery products; and some are regional committees. The UK is represented by officials from this and other Government Departments. Representatives of industry and consumer organisations may also attend.

The commission determines the need for a standard and arranges for it to be drafted. There then follows an eight-step procedure—which can in certain circumstances be reduced to five steps—in which the standards are reviewed twice by the specific committee and the commission and twice by Governments and international organisations before adoption.

Decisions at committee and commission meetings are generally taken by consensus. When it does occur, formal voting is either by a simple showing of hands of those eligible to vote—one vote per member country present—or, if demanded by any member, a roll call vote, where the vote of each member is recorded. The commission may also decide a matter by secret ballot.

Feline Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the incidence of reported feline spongiform encephalopathy for each available year until 1989; and if he will make a statement on his estimates of unreported feline spongiform encephalopathy for this period. [3361]

Mrs. Browning: The number of feline spongiform encephalopathy cases confirmed by date of clinical onset for each month since 1989 at 29 October 1996 is:

	January	*February*	*March*	*April*	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*
1989	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
1990	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	0	2	4	0	1
1991	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	3	1	0	1	2
1992	0	1	1	3	1	0	0	2	1	3	0	1
1993	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	1	3	1	1
1994	1	2	2	1	0	0	2	0	2	2	2	0
1995	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
1996[1]	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Data incomplete.

No earlier cases have been identified. We have no evidence to suggest that under reporting of FSE cases occurs.

1. The data do not include five cases confirmed in 1996 for which detailed information is not yet available.

2. Previous figures supplied for numbers of FSE cases have been on the basis of year of administrative confirmation and not on the basis of date of clinical onset of disease as is the case with the above. It would not be appropriate to provide monthly figures by the month of confirmation because of the time lag between suspicion and confirmation. The above figures will therefore not necessarily reflect previous figures given.

Fishing Permits

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he estimates the European Union will institute a common fishing permit system. [3311]

Mr. Baldry: Council regulations 3760/92 and 1627/94 provide the framework for Community licence and permit systems to enable member states to regulate fishing activities. They are the basis for the detailed measures in western waters introduced on 1 January 1996. The United Kingdom fishing industry is therefore already familiar with these arrangements, which involved licences issued by UK fisheries departments. They do not entail a European fleet run from Brussels.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the rules and regulations he proposes to repeal or amend by means of a reference to the Deregulation Committee before the end of 1996; and if he will make a statement. [3200]

Mr. Boswell: The Ministry has already made use of order-making powers to deregulate aspects of the Corn Returns Act 1882 and the Slaughterhouses Act 1974. We currently have no plans to present further proposals to Parliament this year.

Vaccinations

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what figures he collates relating to the costs of vaccination of cats and dogs in the United Kingdom. [3067]

Mrs. Browning: None. The price of vaccines and the fees charged by veterinary surgeons are matters of commercial judgment.

Ritual Slaughter

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much meat from animals slaughtered by a religious method for the food of *(a)* Muslims and *(b)* Jews was exported from the United Kingdom in (i) 1993, (ii) 1994 and (iii) 1995. [3624]

Mrs. Browning: Data are not separately available for exports of meat from animals slaughtered by religious methods and those slaughtered by other methods.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

School Heads and Governors (Duties)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the number of pages of legislation extant that are now directly applicable to heads or governors of *(a)* maintained and *(b)* grant-maintained schools in respect of their obligations and duties; and in each case what estimate she had made of the additional number arising from the Education Bill. [2554]

Mr. Forth: No such estimate has been made. Head teachers and governors carry important and wide-ranging responsibilities for the education of their pupils, alongside local education authorities and other parties. These responsibilities are duly set out in current and prospective statute, but cannot sensibly be assessed in terms of the number of pages of legislation.

Departmental Offices (Security)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment who are the contractors for security services to cover the offices of her Department in *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* Mexborough; what is the total cost of the contract; and if she will make a statement. [2676]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 11 November 1996:

As the Employment Service (ES) is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your question about the contractors for security services to cover the offices of her Department in Doncaster and Mexborough and the total cost of the contract. This is something which falls to me within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The ES takes very seriously the issue of security within its premises. In preparation for any significant change to our working methods there is a legal obligation to carry out risk assessments to highlight any potential dangers. A risk assessment in accordance with national guidelines was conducted at every ES Jobcentre as part of the preparations for the implementation of Jobseeker's Allowance.

The outcome of the risk assessments at Doncaster Jobcentres showed that two security officers would be required at Trafford Way Jobcentre due to the perceived increased risk to staff following the implementation of Jobseeker's Allowance. The risk assessment carried out at Mexborough Jobcentre showed that security services would not be required.

The contract to provide security services at Trafford Way Jobcentre was awarded to Burns International Security Services (UK) Ltd following a regional tendering exercise carried out under standard ES contracting procedures. The contract to supply two security officers is for a period of 12 months from 9 September with an option to extend for a further two years on annual review. Following a request by my District Manager in Doncaster, Burns International Security Services (UK) Ltd were also contracted to provide one security officer per site at East Laith Gate House, Queensgate House and Queensgate Corner Jobcentres in Doncaster for the period 30 September to 1 November 1996. In addition to static guarding of the premises, the service requirements include monitoring of CCTV systems which were installed in Trafford Way Jobcentre in Doncaster several years ago.

The security officers employed have attended a training course run by the ES's Regional Training Consultancy Services. The course provided instruction and guidance on handling difficult situations. In addition, Burns International Security Services (UK) provide induction training for employees as part of their quality plan.

In the current financial year, ES in Yorkshire and the Humber region anticipates that expenditure on security services will be approximately £191,000. Individual contracts are commercial in confidence and therefore I am unable to provide you with details of the costs relating to security services in Doncaster Jobcentres.

I hope this is helpful.

Class Sizes

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of primary schools and secondary schools currently have classes of more than 30; and what were the figures in 1976. [2709]

Mr. Robin Squire: Sixty-five per cent. of primary schools and sixty-one per cent. of secondary schools had at least one class of more than 30 pupils taught by one teacher in January 1996. Comparable information is not available for 1976.

Teacher Training

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were the costs to the Teacher Training Agency of preparing advice to her Department on the future supply of teachers in each of the last three years. [2956]

Mr. Forth: It is not one of the Teacher Training Agency's statutory functions to offer advice to DFEE on the future supply of teachers.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were the costs to the Teacher Training Agency in the last full year for which figures are available of *(a)* the procedures required for the approval and scrutiny of courses of initial teacher education and *(b)* the scrutiny and development of criteria and courses of continuing professional development for assistant and head teachers. [2955]

Mr. Forth: The Teacher Training Agency is responsible for the accreditation of providers of initial teacher training, a function which replaced individual approval of courses by DFEE in 1995. The Office for Standards in Education is responsible for the inspection of initial teacher training.

In respect of continuing professional development, the TTA maintains a list of registered providers of training under head teachers leadership and management programme, Headlamp; has drawn up standards to underpin the development of the national professional qualification for headship; and is developing at the Secretary of State's request a fuller professional framework with standards and training at other levels. Ofsted is inspecting at TTA's request the training offered by registered Headlamp providers, and has more general functions in respect of the inspection of in-service teacher training.

I will ask the chairman of the TTA, Geoffrey Parker, and, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools Chris Woodhead, to write to the hon. Member direct with estimated costings for relevant functions.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what INSET funding was distributed to institutions in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96; what is available in 1996–97; and what was the cost of administering this funding through (i) Higher Education Funding Council for England and (ii) the Teacher Training Agency during the period concerned. [2500]

Mr. Forth: Funding for higher education courses for in-service training of teachers, INSET, is calculated and distributed on the basis of academic years. This funding was not separately identified by HEFCE in 1993–94. The amount of recurrent funding allocated for such courses in later years by the HEFCE and TTA is set out in the following table.

It is impossible to identify the cost of administering this funding between 1993–94 and 1995–96 because it formed part of a larger academic subject category; the cost of administering the funding through the TTA in 1996–97 is estimated to be £28,000.

Funding for INSET courses provided by HEFCE and TTA

	£ million
1994–95 (HEFCE)	24
1995–96 (HEFCE)	25
1996–97 (TTA)	25

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much was spent on administration *(a)* by the Teacher Training Agency in the current year following the transfer of the teacher training responsibilities of the teaching as a career unit, the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, and the Department for Education and *(b)* by the teaching as a career unit, the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education and the Department for Education in the full year prior to the transfer, separately identifying staff costs in cash and real terms. [2499]

Mr. Forth: The amount spent on the administration of functions which were subsequently transferred to the TTA by the teaching as a career unit, the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education and the Department for Education during 1993–94 is shown in the following table. The total amount spent on administration by the TTA during 1995–96 is also shown in the table. This covers the full range of the TTA's functions under the 1994 Act, which also includes functions transferred from HEFCE and new activities in pursuit of the agency's statutory remit.

Running costs for activities transferred to the TTA

TASC, CATE and Department[1]	*1993–94*
Running costs	£1,316,195
of which:	
Salaries	£980,046
FTE Staff	34.8
TTA	1995–6
Running costs	£2,414,000
of which:	
Salaries	£1,303,000
FTE Staff (average)	42

[1] Figures for DFE staff and costs are estimates only, as the functions formed part of the work of a number of teams.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was spent on *(a)* staff and *(b)* administration of the Teacher Training Agency (i) from the date of its inception to the financial year end 1994–95, (ii) from April 1995 to September 1995, (iii) from October 1995 to March 1996 and (iv) from April 1996 to September 1996; and what was the number of full-time equivalent staff employed by the agency on the last day of each period. [2501]

Mr. Forth: This is a matter for the Teacher Training Agency. I will ask the chairman of the agency, Geoffrey Parker, to write to the hon. Member direct.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the latest figures for graduates *(a)* applying for and *(b)* accepted by institutions for training as teachers by secondary schools by subject; and if she will list the equivalent figures for (i) 1994–95 and (ii) 1995–96. [2502]

Mr. Forth: The following table shows the number of graduate applications to secondary initial teacher training courses in 1994–95 and 1995–96 and the number of acceptances in 1995–96.

Postgraduate initial teacher training courses

England and Wales

Secondary	*1994–95 Applications*	*1995–96 Applications*	*Acceptances*
Mathematics	2,186	1,873	1,257
English	2,819	2,837	1,825
Drama	339	360	225
Science	4,020	3,698	2,377
Biology	1,444	1,347	855
Chemistry	886	799	485
Physics	686	511	317
Geology	70	40	14
Comb/General Sciences	871	932	662
Env/Rural Sciences	63	69	44
Modern Languages	2,706	2,680	1,680
French	1,368	1,413	882
German	455	384	254
Italian	20	11	6
Russian	22	19	6
Spanish	269	251	133
Celtic Languages	59	52	40
Other Modern Languages	513	550	359

Postgraduate initial teacher training courses

England and Wales

Secondary	*1994–95 Applications*	*1995–96 Applications*	*Acceptances*
Technology	2,056	1,549	1,007
Design and Technology	1,189	680	456
Information Technology	73	181	106
Business Studies	713	608	386
Home Economics	81	80	59
History	1,984	2,017	885
Geography	1,280	1,297	876
PE	947	1,062	635
Art	352	939	571
Music	646	594	431
RE	741	845	603
Other	920	903	355
Economics	275	322	145
Social Studies	492	442	157
Classics	73	56	37
Outdoor Activity	80	83	16
Total secondary	20,996	20,654	12,727

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to market-test the functions of the Teacher Training Agency. [2503]

Mr. Forth: It is Government policy that every non-departmental public body should be subject to a comprehensive review at least every five years. This includes a critical examination of the justification for an NDPB on policy grounds, including whether there are other means of providing the desired services, as well as a review of the system of financial and management control. The TTA will be subject to such a review no later than the financial year 1999–2000.

The TTA already contracts out a range of recurrent work costing £1.444 million where this offers better value for money than undertaking the work in-house.

Teachers' Register

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were the costs, in each of the last three years, to the Department for Education and Employment, of the procedures and publication connected with the list of teachers struck off the register, temporarily or permanently. [2954]

Mr. Forth: The Department does not maintain a register of teachers. It maintains a list—List 99—of teachers and other workers in the education sector who are subject to a bar or restriction on their employment on misconduct or medical grounds. The estimated cost of the work related to barring is £297,000 in 1993–94, £324,000 in 1994–95 and £381,000 in 1995–96.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the cost, in each of the last three years to the Department for Education and Employment, of maintaining the national register of teachers in primary and secondary schools. [2953]

Mr. Forth: The Department does not maintain a register of teachers; the qualifications of teachers form part of the database of teacher records which is maintained primarily for pensions purposes. The team, whose main work is awarding qualified teacher status and collecting information for transfer to the DTR, cost about £420,000 in 1995–96, and broadly the same in real terms in the previous two financial years.

Disabled People

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many disabled people have been given assistance *(a)* to obtain employment and *(b)* to remain in employment in each of the last four quarters for which information is available; what was the expenditure during that period by her Department on the access to work scheme; and what sums were obtained from employers towards the cost of the scheme during the period. [2742]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. G. Fogden to Mr. Dafydd Wigley, dated 11 November 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of disabled people assisted to obtain employment and to remain in employment in each of the last four quarters; and what was spent on disabled people through the Access to Work programme, and the amounts contributed by employers.

The number of disabled people the Employment Service has helped to obtain and remain in work through the Access to Work programme in the four quarters to September 1996 is given in the attached Table 1.

Expenditure on Access to Work brought to account during the same period is given in Table 2. The pattern of expenditure means that each quarter's expenditure does not necessarily relate directly to the number of people helped in that quarter.

The Employment Service does not receive money from employers or others towards the cost of providing help through Access to Work. Since June 1996, for employed people, Access to Work has contributed up to 80% of the approved costs of help between £300 and £10,000, and 100% of costs above £10,000.

I hope this is helpful.

Table 1: People helped through access to work

Quarter ending	*New people helped to obtain work*	*New people helped to remain in work*	*People in work being helped on a continuing basis*
December 1995	501	1,738	4,061
March 1996	367	1,006	4,098
June 1996	331	330	3,423
September 1996	334	456	4,233

Table 2: Access to work expenditure

Quarter ending	*ATW expenditure £ million*
December 1995	4.7
March 1996	5.0
June 1996	3.5
September 1996	3.0

Availability for Work Rule

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her estimate of the revenue implications of changing the availability for work rule to 16 hours per week for people undertaking part-time work or study, or whose normal work pattern is part time. [2769]

Mr. Forth: No such estimate has been made with regard to changing availability rules for people who wish to undertake part-time work or study. It is clear, however, that for people to be available only for work of up to 16 hours per week would significantly restrict the number of jobs for which they were available and reduce their chance of finding work.

Book and Equipment Shortages

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many schools have been found by inspectors to have shortages of books and equipment which have adversely affected the standard of lessons in each of the last three years; and what percentage of schools examined this is; [2764]

(2) when the Office for Standards in Education report on the effects of book and equipment shortages is to be published. [2765]

Mr. Robin Squire: These are matters for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

"30 Tough Questions for LEAs"

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the cost of the leaflet, "30 Tough Questions for LEAs", produced by the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation. [2751]

Mr. Forth: Within the total of grant which the Department allocates each year to the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation, details of expenditure on individual items are a matter for the foundation.

Grant-maintained Status (Expenditure)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the expenditure of her Department in respect of grant-maintained status on (i) promotional publications and videos, (ii) "Going GM" conferences, (iii) press advertisements and associated telephone lines, (iv) expenses for speakers attending meetings in schools, (v) conferences and training for speakers, (vi) grants to the Grant-maintained Schools Centre and Grant-maintained Schools Foundation, (vii) the Funding Agency for Schools and (viii) the Electoral Reform Society in each year since 1988–89. [2752]

Mr. Forth: The information requested, where available, is given in the following table:

£ thousand

	(i)	*(ii)*	*(iii)*	*(iv/v)*	*(vi)*	*(vii)*	*(viii)*
1988–89	n/a	nil	nil	nil	25	nil	34
1989–90	n/a	nil	nil	nil	250	nil	42
1990–91	87	nil	nil	nil	425	nil	85
1991–92	35	nil	nil	nil	600	nil	224
1992–93	246	154	200	19	577	nil	525
1993–94	320	254	207	33	783	1,044	414
1994–95	380	185	nil	70	695	10,927	165
1995–96	179	265	nil	45	835	11,534	67
1996–97	193	73	2	23	549	12,500	56

1. Headings relate to the following items of expenditure:

(i) information publications and videos

(ii) "Going GM" conferences (cost of venues and organisation of conferences)

(iii) press advertisements and telephone service

(iv/v) GM Speakers; expenses, conferences, and training

(vi) Grant-maintained schools centre and foundation

(vii) Funding agency for schools

(viii) Electoral reform society

2. Figures relate to financial years

3. Figures for the financial year 1996–97 are expenditure incurred to date (except for the Funding Agency for Schools, column vii, which is the estimated full year figure).

4. GM Speakers' expenses and conferences and training cannot be disaggregated for all years.

5. The Grant-Maintained Schools Centre became self-supporting from the financial year 1994–95, when the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation was set up.

6. Figures for the funding agency are for setting up, membership and running costs. They do not cover grants for GM schools administered by the agency.

Secondary Schools Staffing Survey

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the results of the 1996 staffing survey will be published. [2757]

Mr. Forth: It is planned to publish information from the 1996 secondary school curriculum and staffing survey in a statistical bulletin by September 1997.

Maintenance Work

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the current backlog of maintenance work in *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools and *(c)* institutions of further education. [2797]

Mrs. Gillan: It is for local education authorities and school governors to assess the need for maintenance work in respect of school premises which they own and maintain.

Further education colleges left local authority control in April 1993 with a maintenance backlog of £839 million. This included £359 million for urgent health and safety works, which the Further Education Funding Council estimates were three quarters complete by April 1996.

Education Spending

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was (i) the actual spending per pupil in each local education authority and (ii) the education standard spending assessment per pupil in *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools and *(c)* total in 1996–97. [2758]

Mr. Robin Squire: Actual spending per pupil for 1996–97 will not be known until the year has ended. The following table shows the 1996–97 education standard spending assessment per pupil in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools for each local education authority, and *(c)* the England averages.

Secondary School and College Students

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* 16-year-olds and *(b)* 17-year-olds were in full-time education at school or college in the autumn term of each year since 1985. [3592]

Mr. Paice: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him in a letter on 21 October 1996 which gave student numbers for the census dates for the academic years requested. A copy of this letter is available in the Library.

Information is not collected on a term by term basis, the census date is in January for schools and in November for further education colleges. However, a new survey which is calculated each September shows the number of pupils in maintained schools at the start of the autumn term from 1994. This information is not available for colleges.

Maintained schools (including maintained special schools)

Thousands

	September 1994	*January 1995*	*September 1995*	*January 1996*
Pupils aged 16	160.3	153.4	170.3	163.2
Pupils aged 17	109.5	106.9	112.7	111.0

SOCIAL SECURITY

North Staffordshire Services

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what provision his Department and its agencies currently make in north Staffordshire for *(a)* review visits, *(b)* provision of social fund money advice, *(c)* local customer surveys, *(d)* public caller offices, *(e)* district information officers, *(f)* non-technical training, *(g)* out-of-hours service and *(h)* freeline advice service; and if he will give in each case the location and staff establishment providing each of the services. [38]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Ms Joan Walley, dated 7 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the provision made in North Staffordshire for *(a)* review visits, *(b)* provision of Social Fund money advice, *(c)* local customer surveys, *(d)* public caller offices, *(e)* district information officers, *(f)* non technical training, *(g)* out of hours service and *(h)* freeline advice service; and in each case the location and staff establishment providing each of the services.

The BA District of North Staffordshire has offices at Hanley, Longton and Newcastle (Staffs). As with other Districts, North Staffordshire is required to review the services it provides to ensure that the most effective service is given within the resources available.

Targeted Reviews are conducted on existing claims by visit, post, and telephone. There are 8 visiting officers based at the Hanley Benefit Offices who also complete visits on New and Repeat claims.

The Agency conducted an internal review into the Social Fund money advice provided by its Districts. This showed that formal money advice was offered very rarely. In view of this and in the context of our commitment to focus resources on our priorities, Social Fund sections ceased to provide money advice from 1 April 1996.

A customer Survey was completed in May 1995 by North Staffordshire District. There are no plans at present to conduct another one.

North Staffordshire District have carried out a review of public caller facilities and fully consulted with interested parties. As a result public caller offices in Leek, Biddulph and Cheadle have been closed. The District continues to offer a full range of advice and information from its offices at Hanley, Longton and Newcastle.

There is one full time District Information Officer serving the North Staffordshire area based at Hanley office.

Non-technical training is provided for North Staffordshire District by an outside contractor. This is an Area contract which provides a comprehensive programme of training courses.

The Out of Hours Service (OOHS) operates in the North Staffordshire District on week days from 5 pm to 9 pm, on Saturdays from 8 am to 5 pm and on Sundays from 8 am to 4 pm. The public have direct access to an answering machine and are contacted within 15 minutes. North Staffordshire is part of a larger area for out of hours services and up to 15 staff are available for duty on a rota basis. There are 4 duty officers based in North Staffordshire with one on duty at the relevant times and the others available if needed.

A national review of the OOHS is currently underway. A consultation exercise with representatives from the Department of Health, Local Authorities and welfare agencies to assess the impact of reduction or withdrawal of OOHS has recently been completed and a decision is expected to be made by the end of the year.

North Staffordshire District does not have a freeline advice service. However staff are able to respond to enquiries with direct access to customers records and are able to provide a more personal advice and information service.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Expenditure

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish in the *Official Report* the undated letter produced by his Department referred to in his answer of 19 July 1995, *Official Report*, column *1487*. [2001]

Mr. Roger Evans: Yes.

The letter reads as follows:

You recently tabled a Parliamentary Question asking what would be the estimated reduction in expenditure on Social Security benefits and on welfare foods and free school meals for Social Security benefit recipients if everybody between the ages of 16 to 65 years who was fit and able to work earned (a) £120 per week gross of tax and national insurance contributions, (b) £140 per week gross and (c) £160 per week gross. At the time I was unable to reply and promised to write.

The estimated savings are shown in the table. These estimates assume that the level of earnings received would involve working 16 hours a week or more, thus excluding entitlement to Income Support. Earnings have also been calculated individually, so that at £120 a week each a couple would be deemed to be earning £240, providing they were both fit for work.

Savings do not increase proportionately to the increase in assumed earnings since earnings of £120 are already sufficient to extinguish income-related entitlement for most claimants.

Benefit	*Gross weekly earnings (Deemed)*		
	£120	*£140*	*£160*
	Estimated savings (£ billion)		
Income Support	12.08	12.08	12.09
Housing Benefit	4.92	5.33	5.7
Family Credit	–1.36	–0.53	0.24
Council Tax Benefit	1.06	1.08	1.09
Unemployment Benefit	1.28	1.28	1.28
Total	17.98	19.24	20.39

Notes:

(i) Based on data from the 1991/92/93 Family Expenditure Surveys and the Income Support 1994 Quarterly Statistical Enquiry modelled at 1995/96 prices and benefit levels

(ii) Figures have been rounded to the nearest £10 million. Due to rounding figures may not add up to the total.

(iii) Positive figures are savings, negative figures are costs.

(iv) Income Support figures include free school meals and welfare foods.

Benefits Agency

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received regarding his proposals to close the Benefits Agency out-of-hours service; and if he will make a statement. [2116]

Mr. Roger Evans: Representations have been received from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, hon. Members, the Association of Directors of Social Services, individual social service departments, local authorities, women and children's aid groups, the Bishop of Bath and Wells and members of the public.

The Benefits Agency has also held meetings with the Department of Health, local authorities, the Scottish Office and welfare agencies. Further meetings to assess financial implications have been arranged with Department of Health, Department of Environment and the Scottish office.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received concerning the Income-related Benefits and Jobseeker's Allowance (Personal Allowances for Children and Young Persons) (Amendment) Regulations 1996; if he will place copies of such representations in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [2128]

Mr. Roger Evans: Since the changes were announced, a small number of letters from hon. Members and the public have been received. Representations were also made to the Social Security Advisory Committee during the period of public consultation on the proposals. The committee's report, and the Government's response to it, were published with the regulations on 11 October and copies were placed in the Library.

Fraud

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his campaign against fraud in social security will include parents with care of children receiving income from a current partner in receipt of benefit; and if he will make a statement. [2450]

Mr. Heald: We are concerned to tackle all types of fraud against the social security system, including, where relevant, the non-disclosure of income by benefit recipients.

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what criteria were used to select the areas of Britain to be singled out for investigation by the Benefits Agency special fraud teams. [3381]

Mr. Heald: The choice of areas for the Spotlight campaigns is mainly based on the ready availability of the necessary DSS and other resources.

Compactness of the locality is also taken into account.

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost to *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Benefits Agency of the current investigation by the Benefits Agency's special fraud teams. [3382]

Mr. Heald: The Department has set aside £3,500,000 for the total costs of the programme of "Spotlight on Benefit Cheats" campaigns. This makes allowance for the costs incurred by the Benefits Agency and other DSS agencies.

Appeals Procedures

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he received during the consultations process in support of the changes of appeals procedures for benefits outlined in "Improving Decision Making and Appeals in Social Security", Cm 3328. [2381]

Mr. Roger Evans: The period for consultation ended on 18 October and we are currently in the process of analysing all the responses received—currently 440. I cannot yet provide the information requested by the hon. Member but will write separately to him once the information becomes available.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the decision to implement changes of appeal procedures for benefits under the Social Security (Adjudication) and Child Support Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1996 before the end of the consultation procedure set out in "Improving Decision Making and Appeals in Social Security", Cm 3328. [2382]

Mr. Evans: When my right hon. Friend the Security of State announced his intention to make these changes on 23 July, he said that he was consulting the Council on Tribunals on the proposals and that, subject to that consultation, regulations would be laid during the recess to take effect in the autumn. This has been done. The changes are intended to improve the appeals process and there is no reason to delay them.

Child Support Agency

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the estimated total of absent parents who in 1992 paid no maintenance for their children; how many such parents have been traced by the Child Support Agency; and what assessment he has made of the agency's record in contacting new absent parents since 1992. [2447]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

Research published in the White Paper "Children Come First" in 1990 showed that, in 1989, around 33 per cent. of lone parents received regular child maintenance.

Since 1992, the number of absent parents who have been traced by the Child Support Agency has increased as follows: 28,240 (1993–94), 49,632 (1994–95), 55,025 (1995–96) and 29,001 in the first six months of 1996–97, showing that the agency has been making steady progress in finding absent parents whose address was unknown to the parent with care. It is not known how many of these were new absent parents.

Maintenance Work

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current backlog of maintenance work in his Department's offices. [2799]

Mr. Burt: The Department has a programme of maintenance works which is tailored to meet the needs of its estate and this is carried out within the resources made available to it. The programme for the current year has outstanding only those projects earmarked for completion before the end of the financial year.

Back to Work Bonus

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of the back to work bonus during a full year; and how many people he estimates will gain. [2783]

Mr. Roger Evans: We anticipate that the first full year in which the back to work bonus will operate in a steady state will be 1998–99. Our latest estimate of the gross cost of the scheme in 1998–99 is £65 million. We estimate that at least 150,000 people will receive a bonus payment each year.

Notes:

1. Estimates are based on 2.1 million unemployed.

2. The cost shown is the gross cost of the scheme. Once behavioural effects are taken into account, we expect that the scheme will be broadly cost neutral. However, the behavioural effects are very difficult to assess accurately.

Benefits Agency Medical Services

Mr. Alan Howath: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the timetable for the negotiations and issue of contracts for the contractorisation of the Benefits Agency medical services. [2774]

Mr. Burt: The tendering process began in 1996 with the publication of an advertisement. Responses were evaluated and five companies selected to enter into negotiations with the Department for the provision of the services. A statement of service requirements—document containing details of the scope of work to be contracted out—will be issued to the shortlisted companies on 20 November. The companies will have time to clarify their understanding of the business and they will then be requested to put forward their proposals.

It is anticipated that contracts will be let by April 1997.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how he plans to safeguard confidential information in contracts for the delivery and administration of social security benefits and medical assessments. [2778]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 24 July, *Official Report*, column *586*.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions have taken place with NHS hospital trusts concerning the contractorisation of the Benefits Agency medical services; what agreements have been reached concerning the fees which the trusts may charge private sector companies for the release of claimants' medical records; and how the additional cost will be financed. [2776]

Mr. Burt: We are currently discussing this issue with the NHS executive. Whatever the outcome, it is imperative that provision of these services will not lead to an increase in the expenditure of public funds.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many contracts he intends to issue for the contractorisation of the Benefits Agency medical services; and which companies have been shortlisted for consideration. [2775]

Mr. Burt: The undertaking has been divided into three contract packages based on geographical areas; however the contracts may be awarded to fewer than three contractors.

Five companies have been chosen to enter into negotiations with the Department for the provision of a medical service. Those companies are Andersens, BMI, Capita, EDS Ltd. and Sema.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has made for the financing of the costs of claimants' travel expenses to medical centres following the contractorisation of the Benefits Agency medical services. [2779]

Mr. Burt: No changes to the policy on reimbursement of travel expenses are planned. The responsibility for paying the expenses will however transfer to the successful contractors(s) following contract award.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which organisations he has consulted on the contractorisation of the Benefits Agency medical services. [2773]

Mr. Burt: As part of the process to determine the feasibility of contracting out Benefits Agency medical services, market research was undertaken with a wide range of organisations which included medical, IT and managed services companies.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what performance targets he plans to include in contracts with private sector companies taking over the functions of the Benefits Agency medical services. [2777]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 16 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *509*. Targets and performance indicators will be matters for discussion and negotiation prior to contract(s) being awarded.

Benefits Agency (Attacks on Staff)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures *(a)* are in place and *(b)* are being introduced to protect staff from attack by Benefits Agency clients. [2767]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is an operational matter for Mr. Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 7 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what measures (a) are in place and (b) are being introduced to protect staff from attack by Benefit Agency clients.

My answer to your question concentrates on the delivery of Benefit services by BA staff, in Employment Service Jobcentres following the recent introduction of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). Virtually all Benefits Agency offices have floor to ceiling screened protection and there are no plans to remove screens in Benefits Agency offices.

The Benefits Agency and Employment Service have worked together to identify the risks to health and safety arising out of the introduction of JSA. We have taken the necessary practical steps to minimise risks, consistent with the need to ensure the effective delivery of services provided from Jobcentres. It was agreed that the Employment Service should initiate a nationwide programme of health and safety risk assessments at each of their Jobcentres to identify the appropriate measures required for that particular site.

A full risk assessment audit has been conducted throughout England, Scotland and Wales. Comprehensive assessments have been carried out in all 1,100 Jobcentres, and the resultant risk reduction measures are intended to minimise the risks to staff while supporting the operational necessity for JSA to be administered in an open-plan environment. Examples of additional measures which have been introduced into Jobcentres following the Risk Assessments are panic alarms, closed circuit television and extra security guards. Local risk assessors are free to recommend any counter measures they feel appropriate. Where the Risk Assessment recommends delivery of an element of a benefit process from a screened environment, this aspect of service would be delivered from screened BA premises.

The assessment process is ongoing. A generic review was completed some weeks ago and a full review is planned when the new benefit is more established.

I hope my reply has helped to explain the position and you find it helpful.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the level of the *(a)* invalidity pension in December 1978 and *(b)* current level of incapacity benefit as a percentage of average earnings. [1415]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

	Percentage of average earnings
Basic rate invalidity pension December 1978	[1]23.2
Basic long term rate incapacity benefit August 1996	[2]17.4

Notes:

[1] *Based on average earnings for men aged 21 or over and women aged 18 or over in full time employment.*

[2] Based on average earnings figures for all full time employees.

Source:

New earnings survey, Office of National Statistics.

Disability Benefit

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what have been the annual savings to his Department in constant prices of ending the link between disability benefit and average earnings. [1417]

Mr. Burt: The link between invalidity benefit and earnings was broken in 1980 to ensure that long-term provision of benefit based on incapacity should be sustainable.

The additional costs which would have been incurred had invalidity benefit been increased by average earnings are set out in the table.

Year	*Additional cost 1996–97 prices £ million*
1980–81	5
1981–82	35
1982–83	45
1983–84	55
1984–85	110
1985–86	125
1986–87	205
1987–88	315
1988–89	410
1989–90	505
1990–91	595
1991–92	685
1992–93	860
1993–94	985
1994–95	1,055

1. Estimates cover invalidity pension and adult dependency increases only. 2. Estimates rounded to nearest £5 million.

3. Estimates converted to 1996–97 prices using the GDP deflator.

4. Other benefit offsets estimated using family expenditure survey data.

Hearing Impairment Aids

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been spent by his Department on aids for those with hearing impairments in each of the last 10 years in constant prices. [1418]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Expenditure at 1995–96 prices

	£
1993–94	215,697.14
1994–95	319,441.49
1995–96	381,767.49

Retired Citizens

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent public representations he has received on the range of Government policies available for needy retired citizens. [1297]

Mr. Heald: I met with representatives from "Pensioners Voice" on 5 November. A number of letters have also been received from individual members of the public.

Industrial Injuries

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total cost of operating the PD D12 scheme, including administration, medical boards and awards but excluding the cost of medical appeal tribunals. [3251]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available.

The PD D12 scheme is one of some 70 prescribed diseases for which disablement benefit may be claimed. The costs of the administration of individual prescribed diseases are not identified separately.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total number of applicants for PD D12 to date; how many awards have been made; what is the average weekly award made; and what is the average disablement assessment for the disease. [3250]

Mr. Evans: As at 30 September 1996, there had been 48,778 claims and 5,352[1] awards of industrial injuries disablement benefit for prescribed disease PD D12. The average weekly rate is estimated at £54.72, based on April 1996 benefit rates, and the average disablement assessment is 55 per cent[2].

Notes:

[1] Includes 35 assessments of 1 to 13 per cent. which resulted in an award of an aggregated pension since 3 October 1994. Not all claims will have been decided.

[2] The estimates are based on a 10 per cent. sample with an allowance for late returns.

Source:

BREM System and Benefits Agency central data unit.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is average cost of a single MAT case; and how many PD D12 appellants there were between September 1993 and September 1996. [3252]

Mr. Evans: The information is not readily available in the format requested. The average cost to the independent tribunal service of a medical appeal tribunal case cleared, is estimated at £578, excluding departmental agency costs. The Benefits Agency estimates that its costs are in the region of £60 per case.

Information on the number of appellants in respect of PD D12 is available only for the period from 13 September 1993 to 2 October 1994, when there were 7,817 appeals, including 1,654 appeals to an medical appeal tribunal. Information on PD D12 appellants for later periods could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Retirement Pensions

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will recalculate the figures in table 6, paragraph 7.12 of "Options for Equality in State Pension Age": *(a)* on the basis of current prices and *(b)* on the assumption that a individual reverted to the full basis state pension at age 75 years. [3318]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the tables:

Table 6, paragraph 7.12 of "Options for Equality in State Pension Age": recalculated on the basis of current prices

1996–97 prices *£ per week*

Basic pension available at different ages	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
Age 63 "pivot"	49	53	56	61	66	72	77	84	92	101	110
Age 65 "pivot"	42	45	48	53	56	61	66	72	79	86	95

Table 6, paragraph 7.12 of "Options for Equality in State Pension Age": recalculated on the basis of current prices assuming pension increases to full basic pension at age 75 for those retiring before the pivot.[1]

1996–97 prices *£ per week*

Basic pension available at different ages	*60*	*61*	*62*	*63*	*64*	*65*	*66*	*67*	*68*	*69*	*70*
Age 63 'pivot'	45	49	55	61	66	72	77	84	92	101	110
Age 65 'pivot'	35	39	42	48	54	61	66	72	79	86	95

Note:

[1] It has been assumed that where someone retired before the pivot age then their reduced pension will be increased to the full basic rate when they get to 75. For those that retire after the pivot age, and thus receive a higher initial pension, it has been assumed that this higher rate of pension will continue to be paid after age 75.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list the number of awards of retirement pension made for the last year for which figures are available by *(a)* category of pension, *(b)* age and *(c)* sex; and if he will list for each (i) the average rate of basic pension payable and (ii) the average rate of net additional pension; [3314]

(2) if he will list by benefit type the number of new awards of retirement pension made, for the last year for which figures are available, to people who were eligible for social security benefits at the start of the period; [3317]

(3) if he will list by gender the number of new awards of *(a)* basic and *(b)* additional retirement pension, for the last year for which figures are available, which are deferred, by (i) the average period of deferment, (ii) the percentage increase for deferred retirement and (iii) the average percentage; [3315]

(4) if he will list by *(a)* sex and *(b)* age the number of new awards of retirement pension made, for the last year for which figures are available, to people who had income from (i) an occupational pension and (ii) a personal pension at the start of the period; and if he will indicate the average income from these income sources; [3321]

(5) if he will list the number of new awards of (1) basic and (2) retirement pensions made, for the last year for which figures are available, by *(a)* sex and *(b)* income band for (i) single pensioners and (ii) pensioner couples. [3316]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available.

Frozen Pensions

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those countries outside the EU where British state pensioners *(a)* do and *(b)* do not receive the annual uprating; and if he will set down the guiding principles behind the decision to place non-EU countries chosen by British pensioners for their retirement into the uprated or the frozen category. [3301]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the lists.

Lists A and B show the overseas countries outside the European economic area[1] where United Kingdom retirement and widow's pensions were paid in July 1996. Annual pension upratings are payable in the countries listed in A. Upratings are not payable in the countries listed in B.

The general rule is that annual pension increases are not payable outside the United Kingdom unless European Community regulations or reciprocal social security agreements provide otherwise. Reciprocal agreements with the countries listed in A were entered into with a view to providing a measure of social protection for workers, and members of their families, when moving from one country to the other during their working lives. In order to enter into an agreement with the UK the other country's social security scheme had to be sufficiently similar to provide for reciprocity. Increasingly, there had to be sufficient movement of workers between the two countries to justify the outlay of resources to negotiate, operate and maintain the agreement. Above all, any additional costs had to be affordable.

List A: Non-EEA countries where annual upratings are payable

Barbados
Bermuda
Bosnia-Herzegovina[2]
Croatia[2]
Cyprus
Guernsey
Isle of Man
Israel
Jamaica
Jersey
Macedonia[2]
Malta
Mauritius
Philippines
Slovenia[2]
Switzerland
Turkey
USA
Yugoslavia

[1] Comprises EC member states plus Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein. EC regulations on social security for migrant workers apply throughout the European Economic Area.

[2] Formerly a constituent republic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). Annual pension increases payable by virtue of the 1958 reciprocal agreement with FRY.

List B: Countries where annual upratings are not payable

Afghanistan
Albania
Algeria
Andorra
Angola
Anguilla
Antiqua and Barbuda
Argentina
Armenia
Ascension Island
Australia
Bahamas
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Belarus
Belize
Benin
Bhutan
Bolivia
Botswana
Brazil
British Virgin Islands
Brunei
Bulgaria
Burma
Burundi
Cameroon
Canada
Cape Verde Islands
Cayman Islands
Chile

China
Colombia
Congo
Cook Islands
Costa Rica
Cuba
Czech Republic
Denmark
Djibouti
Dominica
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Estonia
Ethiopia
Falkland Islands
Faroe Islands
Fiji
Gambia
Ghana
Grenada
Guatemala
Guinea
Guinea-Bissau
Guyana
Honduras
Hong Kong
Hungary
Iceland
India
Indonesia
Iran
Iraq
Japan
Jordan
Kampuchea
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Kiribati
Korea (South)
Kuwait
Laos
Latvia
Lebanon
Lesotho
Liberia
Libya
Liechtenstein
Lithuania
Macau
Malagasy Republic
Malawi
Malaysia (including Sabah and Sarawak)
Maldive Islands
Mexico
Monaco
Mongolia
Montserrat
Morocco
Mozambique
Namibia
Nepal
Netherlands Antilles
New Caledonia
New Zealand
Nicaragua
Nigeria
Norfolk Island
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Panama
Papua New Guinea
Paraguay
Peru
Poland
Puerto Rico
Qatar
Romania
Russia
St. Helena and Dependencies
St. Kitts–Nevis
St. Lucia
St. Martin
St. Vincent
San Marino
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Singapore
Slovak Republic
Solomon Islands
Somalia
South Africa
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Swaziland
Syria
Taiwan
Tanzania
Thailand
Togo
Tonga
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turks and Caicos Islands
Tuvalu
Uganda
Ukraine
United Arab Emirates
Uruguay
Vanuatu (New Hebrides)
Vatican City
Venezuela

Vietnam

Virgin Islands (USA)

Western Samoa

Yemen, Republic of Zaire

Zambia

Zimbabwe.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list Government expenditure on social security and welfare services as a percentage of gross domestic product following the definition adopted by "Eurostat, General Government Accounts and Statistics 1981–1992", page 25, table D for *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* as many OECD countries as are readily available to his Department. [3068]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to Eurostat publication "General Government accounts and statistics 1970–1993", a copy of which is available in the Library.

War Pensioners (Hearing Disorders)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent changes in provision for hearing disorders the War Pensions Agency is now introducing; how they affect the provision of remedial help for service-related hearing loss; when these changes were submitted for parliamentary approval; what representations he has received about them; and if he will make a statement. [3072]

Mr. Heald: Article 26 of the Service Pensions Order 1983 gives the Secretary of State a discretionary power to defray necessary expenses relating to the treatment of an ex-member of the armed forces arising as a result of disablement due to service, including the cost of aids and appliances such as hearing aids. The power cannot be used, however, when the treatment, aid or appliance is provided under other UK legislation.

The long-standing policy has been to use that discretionary power to defray the costs of non-standard hearing aids for war pensioners only where a standard aid was not medically suitable.

With the implementation of the NHS Trust and Community Care Act 1990, the NHS is no longer restricted to supplying hearing aids from a limited list of models. NHS hearing aid centres may now purchase and supply on free loan any type of hearing aid that they consider appropriate in any individual case.

It was recently recognised that our operational procedures had not kept up with this change in the NHS arrangements. The procedures have now been amended to ensure that they reflect fully both the policy intention and the limitations placed on the Secretary of State's discretionary powers.

Any war pensioner resident in the UK approaching the War Pensions Agency for a hearing aid is now being advised to access the NHS system in the normal way. War pensioners will not be disadvantaged by these operational changes as there is now no specific hearing impairment for which the NHS cannot supply a suitable aid.

The changes have not been submitted for parliamentary approval because there has been no change in either the law or normal policy.

We have, to date, received one letter concerning the changes, from the national chairman of the Royal British Legion.

National Insurance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of uncollected national insurance contributions for *(a)* 1991–92, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [3386]

Mr. Heald: all employees whose earnings reach or exceed a minimum level are liable to pay class 1 national insurance contributions. It is the responsibility of the employer, in the first instance, to pay both their own (secondary) and their employee's (primary) share of the contribution at the time earnings are paid.

Estimates of the underpayment of class 1 NICs have been made through two employer compliance surveys; however these covered only the years 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1995–96. The survey in respect of the 1995–96 tax year provided an estimate that £92.8 million NICs (primary and secondary) were not paid. This figure represents 0.21 per cent. of the total amount paid by way of NICs in 1995–96.

The Contributions Agency commissioned the first survey in 1994 and following analysis and review of the results a further survey was carried out in respect of the performance in the 1995–96 tax year.

Self-employed contributors pay class 2 and class 4 contributions. Class 2 contributions are paid by direct debit payments or in response to the issue of quarterly bills. Estimates as to unpaid class 2 contributions could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Class 4 contributions are collected by the Inland Revenue, which draws up its accounts on the last Friday in October. The figures for the year ended 1996 are not available, the figures for the years ended 1992 and 1995 the amounts of class 4 contributions uncollected and written off were:

1992: £61.9 million

1995: £34.5 million

Figures for class 4 contributions are for England, Wales and Scotland only.

War Pensioners

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which local authorities in the year ended March 1995 had a policy in addition to the statutory scheme *(a)* of disregarding all of a war pensioner's income when assessing housing and council tax benefit, *(b)* of no disregard and *(c)* of disregarding an element of the income; and for each of those named in *(c)* what was the level of disregard applied, the cost to each authority of applying the disregard and the number of war pensioners in each authority to whom the disregard applied. [3591]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what regulations his Department proposes to repeal by the end of 1996; if he proposes to conduct a compliance cost assessment on each regulation repealed; and what is the estimated cost of undertaking a compliance cost assessment to determine the advantages and disadvantages of such a repeal. [3446]

Mr. Heald: The Department currently proposes to amend the following regulations which impact on business by the end of 1996;

The Statutory Sick Pay (General) Regulations (No. 13) 1982 No. 894.

It is anticipated that the changes will come into effect on 6 April 1997.

Since the effect will be to reduce rather than increase compliance costs, a compliance cost assessment is not required. Departments do, however seek to estimate approximate savings where ever possible. The cost of undertaking a CCA varies from case to case but is generally modest. Because part of the cost falls on the business consulted, a full CCA would be inappropriate for measures designed to reduce business burdens.

We plan to repeal a number of other regulations which have no effect on business.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 12 November 1996

ENVIRONMENT

Planning Guidance

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evaluation his Department has made of the capacity of the planning system to absorb a new *(a)* low-impact and *(b)* permaculture use class into existing guidelines; and what assessment he has made of the advantages of this policy. [3368]

Sir Paul Beresford: We have not conducted such research.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has made of the advantages of giving additional weight to environmental impact in determining planning restrictions on agricultural buildings. [3370]

Sir Paul Beresford: We published research on planning controls over agricultural forestry development last December. The report "Planning Controls over Agricultural and Forestry Development and Rural Building Conversations" is available from HMSO.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research his Department has *(a)* planned, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* evaluated into the advantages of establishing a permaculture use class within the planning system; and if he will make a statement. [3236]

Sir Paul Beresford: None.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to review *(a)* planning policy guidance and *(b)* other planning guidance on agricultural and other dwellings in the countryside in order to give greater weight to environmental and social sustainability; and if he will make a statement. [3299]

Sir Paul Beresford: We are reviewing PPG7. We issued a draft revision for public consultation earlier this year.

Standard Spending Assessment (Lincolnshire)

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on discussions his Department has had with North Lincolnshire council and North East Lincolnshire council regarding their standard spending assessment for 1997–98. [3221]

Sir Paul Beresford: My officials have been in correspondence with the authorities on issues currently under consideration about possible changes in the standard spending assessment for 1997–98. Their views, and indeed those of others who have made representations to my Department, will be taken into account when we finalise our decisions on the 1997–98 settlement.

I have also met a delegation from the area, led by the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), which made representations about SSAs.

All authorities will have the opportunity to make representations on the proposals for next year's settlement during the consultation period which follows the provisional local government finance settlement soon after the Budget statement, which will be made on 26 November.

Low-impact Accommodation

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the role of low-impact and self-built accommodation in the provision of affordable housing; and if he will make a statement. [3373]

Mr. Clappison: In the last financial year, 7 per cent. of all new housing completions in the United Kingdom were self-built. My Department has grant-supported a number of charitable trusts and agencies promoting low-impact self-build accommodation in the belief that this represents a valuable contribution to the provision of affordable housing.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research his Department has *(a)* planned, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* evaluated into establishing practical criteria for assessing sustainable and low–impact developments, with particular regard to rural areas; and if he will make a statement. [3270]

Sir Paul Beresford: We have commissioned good practice guidance on planning for sustainable development. Work on this continues, with a view to publication next year. We have no plans for research into "low–impact developments".

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has made of the capacity of the planning system to accommodate low–impact development; and if he will make a statement. [3359]

Sir Paul Beresford: We have not conducted such research.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the advantages of amending the Building Regulations to make it obligatory to conform to the highest energy—saving standards; and if he will make a statement. [3188]

Mr. Clappison: The Building Regulations require only that reasonable provision should be made for the conservation of fuel and power. They do not make it obligatory to conform to the highest energy–saving standards. The regulations were last amended in July 1994 and the changes came into effect in July 1995. In the normal way, arrangements have been made to assess the advantages gained from the changes after two to three years' experience.

Radioactive Waste Sites

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the chief executive of the Environment Agency concerning the agency's independent evaluation of Nirex's research on the suitability of sites near Sellafield for final disposal of intermediate-level radioactive waste; and what further discussions he plans. [3416]

Mr. Clappison: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no formal discussions with the chief executive of the Environment Agency but does from time to time have discussions with the chairman, Lord De Ramsey, on various matters.

Leasehold Enfranchisement Advisory Service

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has in respect of the funding of the leasehold enfranchisement advisory service in the coming financial year. [3537]

Mr. Curry: The leasehold enfranchisement advisory service has submitted a proposal concerning future funding arrangements and this is being considered. No final decision will be made before the Budget when it will become clear what funds will be available to my Department in the coming financial year.

Rural Business Use Class

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for a reformulation of the new rural business use class to a sustainable rural business use class; and what assessment he has made of the desirability of such a reformulation. [3503]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department's consultation paper describing the proposed rural business use class made it plain that the objective was to encourage development that sustained the character of rural areas while controlling business uses that were likely to generate excessive traffic. As such, the proposal is already consistent with the principles of sustainable development.

Construction Skills Certification

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many operatives have been registered under the construction skills certification scheme to date, broken down to show *(a)* bricklayers, *(b)* roofers and tilers, *(c)* painters and decorators, *(d)* partitioning fixers and *(e)* piling operatives, indicating in each case what percentage those registered represent of the total numbers employed in each grade. [3538]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Information on registrations under the scheme is the property of Construction Skills Certification Scheme Ltd.

Leasehold Property

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the code of management practice in respect of leasehold property for which provision was made in section 87 of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993. [3536]

Mr. Curry: Two codes, entitled "Rent" and "Service Charges", concerning the management of residential property, have been prepared by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and submitted to the Secretary of State. They will be approved by order to be laid before Parliament on 21 November. A code of practice covering private sheltered leasehold housing, produced by the Association of Retirement Housing Managers, came into force on 1 January this year.

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 5 November, *Official Report*, column *463*, if he will list the criteria for the future operation of the Building Research Establishment specified by him in April which were not satisfied by the proposal from the Construction Industry Council for a national centre for construction. [3566]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My answer of 5 November made it clear that our judgment related to whether the package of proposals put forward by the Construction Industry Council provided a basis on which to take forward single tender sale negotiations, rather than whether the proposal for a national centre met particular criteria. It would be wrong, in any event, to enter into discussion about the merits of the NCFC proposal, when the Construction Industry Council bid for BRE, at its request, remains available for consideration, in competition with other bids that may come forward.

Office of Water Services

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by how much Ofwat has exceeded its budget in *(a)* the current year, *(b)* last year and *(c)* the previous year. [3110]

Mr. Clappison: Ofwat did not exceed its budget in 1994–95. Regarding expenditure in 1995–96 and 1996–97, I refer the hon. Member to paragraphs 5 and 11 of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's answer of Monday 4 November 1996, *Official Report*, columns *346–48*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day).

Hillingdon Unitary Development Plan

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what meetings officials of his Department have had with officers of Hillingdon borough council to discuss the objections he has lodged with the council to its proposed changes to Hillingdon's draft unitary development plan; and what meetings are planned for the future; [3708]

(2) to which of its proposed changes to the Hillingdon draft unitary development plant his Department lodged objections with Hillingdon borough council; [3709]

(3) on what grounds his Department lodged objections with Hillingdon borough council to its proposed changes to the Hillingdon draft unitary development plan; [3710]

(4) if he will publish in the *Official Report* the text of his letter to Hillingdon borough council in objection to its planned changes to Hillingdon's unitary development plan. [3711]

Sir Paul Beresford: Objections were made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to 26 proposed modifications. The objections were made to modifications that appeared to bring the plan into conflict with national or regional policies without good reason and where that was proposed would result in the plan lacking clarity such that it could cause great difficulties to users later.

Twelve modifications concerned green-belt and metropolitan open land; six modifications would produce policies or proposals that were unclear or imprecise; and three modifications conflicted with our preferred approach to planning and affordable housing. A further five modifications to which objections were made related to proposals for residential development on two recreation grounds.

Objections to the published modifications in respect of the deposited Hillingdon unitary development plan are addressed to the council of the London borough of Hillingdon. I would be pleased to provide a copy of the objections made by my right hon. Friend, but the approach in the first place should be to the council.

We encourage local authorities to meet objectors to discuss objections. These informal meetings are helpful, not least to consider how the plan might be changed to meet the objections. Officials in the Government office for London and those from Hillingdon have met recently to pursue the objections made by my right hon. Friend. Further discussion is likely once Hillingdon's response to the objections it has received is known.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has, following the consultation, to vary any of the proposals to tighten up the compulsory competitive tendering framework for local authority professional services and housing management which he announced in May. [4112]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Secretary of State is today writing to the local authority associations to consult them on draft regulations which we intend to put before the House early in the new year. The Welsh and Scottish Offices are also writing in similar terms. These draft regulations will amend the existing CCT framework for local authorities, other than police authorities in England and Wales. The Government will be considering whether to make comparable changes to the CCT regime for police authorities and will be consulting the relevant associations.

These draft regulations incorporate the proposals which we put forward earlier this year, except that they will include five main variations in respect of English authorities—there are minor differences in the variations for Scotland and Wales:

(a) The means by which authorities calculate the amount of work which must go out to competition to exclude the need for credits and allowances which prevent work from being exposed to competition more than once;

(b) Goods and services which are "bought-in" will be recognised in the new formula. Where work has been awarded after a competition, this will directly work towards satisfying the amount which must be exposed to competition;

(c) As a result of these two changes, which effectively concentrates competition on local authority labour costs, the competition percentages for finance and information technology services will be 50 per cent. and 40 per cent. respectively, except for county councils in England where the Finance competition requirement will be 40 per cent.

(d) On housing management, the "de minimis" level is reduced in due course to 2,500 properties as proposed, but not further reduced to 500 properties as originally proposed;

(e) Authorities are given 18 months from the new regulations coming into force to meet the new requirements on finance and housing management.

These variations address the major concerns that local authorities put to us in the consultation exercise, namely, that the calculation framework remained unclear in the light of our intention to abolish certain credits and allowances, that the proposed 65 per cent. competition percentage on finance cut too deeply into core services and did not recognise differences in the functions of different local authorities, that a 500 property de minimis figure for housing management might mean competitions which cost more than they saved, and that, because local authorities were unprepared for competition beyond the existing CCT requirements, they needed more time than proposed to meet the higher requirements.

The revised package of changes, which is summarised in the table, will restore the amount of white collar work subject to competition to a level first envisaged when the statutory framework was introduced lat year, with an increase in the volume of work where subsequent experience has shown the market is well placed to respond. It will mean we have a much more robust CCT framework which will force authorities to put the interests of local taxpayers first. Local authorities that have voluntarily sought opportunities to involve the private sector will find that the calculation framework recognises this. Authorities that are reluctant to expose work to competition will find it much more difficult to use flexibilities within the rules to avoid competition. External auditors will also have a clear basis for checking local authority calculations.

	Type	*Activity*	*Details*
1	Credit	All	Amend credit on work for LMS and DSM schools
2	Credit	Personnel	Amend credit on Grant for Education Support and Training
3	Calculation/ Allowance	All	Abolish 'double-counting' of work in totals and allowance
4	Credits	All	Abolish credits on work done in support of DSOs and DLOs
5	Calculation/ Allowance	All	Abolish 'pre-shrunk allowance'; create credit for indirectly contracted-out expenditure applied before competition percentage in CCT calculations
6	Allowance	All	Replace 'Bought-in Goods & Services allowance with BIGs credit applied before competition percentage and credit for work awarded under CCT applied after the competition percentage
7	Competition Percentage	Finance	Increase percentage from 35 per cent. to 50 per cent. (40 per cent. in English County Councils)
8	Competition Percentage	Personnel	Increase percentage from 30 per cent. to 40 per cent.
9	Competition Percentage	IT	Reduce percentage from 70 per cent. to 40 per cent.

	Type	Activity	Details
10	De Minimis	Construct & Property	Reduce from £450,000 to £300,000
11	De Minimis	Personnel	Reduce from £400,000 to £300,000
12	De Minimis	Housing Management	Set level at 4,000 properties in England reducing to 2,500 properties. In Wales and Scotland the 2,500 properties figure comes into effect when the regulations take effect.
13	Exemption	Security work	Increase cut-off from 51 per cent. to 81 per cent.
14	Allowance	Vehicle management	Abolish allowance

Lead Pollution (Barham Base)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps have been taken to clean up land contaminated by lead-polluted water at the Barham base near Thetford. [3415]

Mr. Soames: I have been asked to reply, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Effluent Reports

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what effluent reports have been prepared by the Laboratory of the Government Chemist in regard to *(a)* British military bases *(b)* bases made available to the United States in the United Kingdom and *(c)* British overseas territories in each year since 1979; and if he will place copies in the Library. [3281]

Mr. Soames: I have been asked to reply as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Tourism

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what measures she is taking to increase tourism to the north-east of England. [3388]

Mr. Sproat: Government support for tourism is channelled through the statutory British Tourist Authority and English tourist board. Through the ETB, support is made available to the 10 non-statutory regional tourist boards, including the Northumbria tourist board, which helps them undertake a variety of marketing and development activities of benefit to the tourism industry in their regions.

The Northumbria tourist board has been instrumental in widening the appeal of the region. In 1995, the number of UK and overseas visitors to the region rose by over 20 per cent. on 1994. Overseas visitor spend showed an impressive increase of 53 per cent. on the previous year.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the rules and regulations she proposes to repeal or amend by means of a reference to the Deregulation Committee before the end of 1996; and if she will make a statement. [3443]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* The Department of National Heritage does not plan any such repeals or amendments before the end of 1996.

National Heritage Bill

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when an environmental appraisal was produced using the guidance contained in the Department of the Environment's guide "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" for the National Heritage Bill [*Lords*]; and if she will place a copy in the Library. [3309]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* My right hon. Friend has considered the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" and is satisfied that an appraisal of the environmental effects in relation to the National Heritage Bill is not appropriate at this time. We will keep this decision under review as appropriate. The main purpose of the Bill is to extend the powers of the national heritage memorial fund so that it can support applications from a wider range of projects and applicants. There is nothing in the Bill that should have an adverse effect on the environment. On the contrary, the NHMF's new powers will provide greater protection for the environment. The Bill will allow the NHMF to provide support for recording schemes such as a survey of the flora and fauna of our rural areas. Also, privately owned scenic areas which may act as havens for wildlife will become eligible for funds.

British Academy of Sport

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will place in the Library all the bids submitted for the British academy of sport; and if she will make a statement. [3031]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* The bids we received for the British academy of sport are commercially confidential to the bidders. I understand that a small number of bidders have made aspects of their proposals public, but it would be a breach of confidentiality for me to place copies of the bids in the Library.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Citizens Advice Bureau

Mr. Congdon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what arrangements have been made to review Government funding of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and Citizens Advice Scotland. [4046]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department is the major provider of funds to NACAB and CAS. A financial, management and policy review of both organisations began in October. The review will take place in two

stages, the first stage being a prior options review and the second an examination of efficiency and financial management and control systems. Pannell Kerr Forster Associates has been appointed to carry out the work and report its findings to my Department. The report on stage 1 will be submitted before the end of the year, with completion of the review and final report before the end of March 1997. The detailed terms of reference for each stage of the review have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Works Councils

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many United Kingdom-based companies have adopted works councils as specified by the European social chapter. [2820]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The European works councils directive sets down requirements for European level information and consultation arrangements in companies which operate in more than one of the countries covered by the directive and are above a specified size. The directive was adopted under the agreement on social policy and therefore does not apply to the UK, but a number of UK-based companies are affected by it because they have employees above the threshold levels in the countries covered.

My Department does not hold precise information on the numbers of companies affected, but I understand that approximately 40 UK-based companies had reached voluntary agreements by 22 September 1996.

Taxation (Self-assessment)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assurances his Department has *(a)* sought and *(b)* been given from the Inland Revenue regarding its ability to deal with the volume of queries likely to arise regarding self-assessment of taxation. [3113]

Mr. Page: The President of the Board of Trade is aware of the Inland Revenue's preparation for self-assessment which includes a programme to handle inquiries from taxpayers, employers and tax agents. A new telephone helpline has been established to assist taxpayers outside normal working hours.

Century Date Change

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what advice his Department has issued to small businesses regarding the need to plan for changing information technology systems for 2000. [3114]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Taskforce 2000, a cross-private group set up at my invitation to increase awareness of the century data change issue, has over recent weeks stimulated considerable media coverage. The task force is well on its way to ensuring that, by the end of March 1997, maid board level executives in every company in the UK are aware of the problem. The task force has recently produced an awareness pack which my Department will make available through our network of business links and on the web page. The pack contains a statement of the problem, advice to companies and sources of help.

Post Office

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment his Department has made of the percentage of small firms which are *(a)* in favour of and *(b)* against the end of the Post Office's monopoly on letter delivery. [3115]

Mr. Page: None. I am, however, aware of the survey recently carried out by the Federation of Small Businesses on members' attitudes to the future delivery of mail.

Business Links

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the cost of advertising business links. [3259]

Mr. Page: The total cost of the national advertising campaign and supporting publicity activities for business link in 1996–97 will be £4 million. A survey of business link target client companies following the July wave of advertising showed that the campaign was increasing their awareness and understanding of business link. A further survey will be conducted following the present wave of advertising which ends in mid-November.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the rules and regulations he proposes to repeal or amend by means of a reference to the Deregulation Committee before the end of 1996; and if he will make a statement. [3782]

Mr. Page: My Department has consulted or is currently consulting on the following proposals for use of the deregulation order-making power:

- Consumer Credit Act 1974—exempt lending and hiring to unincorporated business from the Act and modify notification requirements for consumer credit licence holders;
- Companies Act 1985—reduce information required on shareholder details;
- Electricity Act 1981—enable projects not linked to the electricity grid to benefit from the fossil fuel levy; and
- Companies Act 1985—alter the law on disclosure of directors shareholdings.

The timing of any reference to the Deregulation Committee will depend on various factors, including the outcome of consultation.

PRIME MINISTER

Anglo-French Summit

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list *(a)* the members of his Office who attended the Anglo-French summit in Bordeaux and *(b)* the positions they hold. [3615]

The Prime Minister: I was accompanied to the Anglo-French summit by three officials and four support staff.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 November. [2182]

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 November. [2183]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Burma

Mr. Parry: To ask the Prime Minister what recent representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Government of Burma regarding abuses of human rights; and if he will make a statement. [3178]

The Prime Minister: We have recently issued several statements about violations of human rights in Burma, and did so again yesterday.

In addition, our ambassador in Rangoon has expressed our grave concern at recent events in Burma on several occasions.

The EU presidency and troika Foreign Ministers also raised these concerns at meetings with the Burmese Foreign Minister on 22 July and 26 September.

Land Mines

Mr. Parry: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from UNICEF concerning land mines in *(a)* Cambodia and *(b)* Thailand; and if he will make a statement. [3175]

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware, none.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Prime Minister what assistance *(a)* Her Majesty's Government and *(b)* non-governmental organisations have given to *(a)* Cambodia, *(b)* Laos and *(c)* Thailand in respect of the clearance of land mines; and if he will make a statement. [3176]

The Prime Minister: Since 1 April 1993, the British Government have committed over £5.1 million for humanitarian mine clearance activities in Cambodia, £543,000 in Laos and £5,000 in Thailand, concentrating on specific clearance projects addressing urgent humanitarian needs. Some of these projects are managed by British non-governmental organisations.

We do not have details of all non-governmental organisations' commitments to mine clearance in Cambodia, Laos and Thailand.

DEFENCE

Unidentified Flying Objects

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what factors underlay his Department's decision that the reported sightings of unidentified flying objects on 5 November 1990 and 31 March 1993 were not of defence significance; [2898]

(2) for what reasons his Department assessed the sightings of an unidentified flying object over RAF Shawbury, referred to in his answer of 24 July, *Official Report*, column *424*, as having no defence significance. [2928]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 8 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *26*.

Gulf War

Mr. Campbell–Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if supplies of vaccine 10HO3A supplied to the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment were used in circumstances relating to the Gulf war. [1674]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. D. N. Campbell–Savours, dated 12 November 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about whether the Vaccine 10HO3A supplied to the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment were used in circumstances relating to the Gulf War. I have been asked to reply since The Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (CBD) is now part of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency of which I am Chief Executive.

I regret that it is not our policy to provide details of the particular vaccines required for the research programme at CBD Porton Down.

I am sorry I could not be more helpful.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on what date vaccine 10HO3A was received by United Kingdom military personnel in the Gulf; [1675]

(2) if named patient requirements as required by the manufacturer were used in the case of vaccine 10HO3A while used in circumstances relating to the Gulf war; [1673]

(3) on what date Her Majesty's Government purchased from the Miles Drug Company, Miles Pharmaceuticals or Bayer UK vaccine 10HO3A; and which was used in the Gulf war; [1672]

(4) how many British Aerospace personnel *(a)* did and *(b)* did not receive doses of vaccine 10HO3A during the course of the Gulf war; [1671]

(5) if he will make a statement on the use of vaccine 10HO3A during the course of the Gulf war. [1670]

Mr. Soames: At present, details relating to biological warfare medical counter-measures remain classified for operational reasons.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what time on 20 and 21 January 1991 United Kingdom personnel were brought into contact with chemical or biological agents near Dhahran. [1677]

Mr. Soames: No chemical or biological agents were detected at Dhahran on 20 and 21 January 1991.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what time on 20 and 21 January 1992 chemical agent monitors indicated sarin in the air in the vicinity of United Kingdom personnel at Dhahran. [1676]

Mr. Soames: There is no evidence of sarin being detected at Dhahran on 20 and 21 January 1991.

Gurkha Troops

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Gurkha troops will be stationed in Britain as a result of the handover of Hong Kong; where they will be stationed; what will be their remuneration relative to British troops of similar rank; and if he will make a statement. [3205]

Mr. Soames: On the completion of the restructuring of the Brigade of Gurkhas, some 2,000 Gurkha troops will be garrisoned in the UK, including those on long leave in Nepal. On current plans they will be stationed as follows:

First Battalion, Royal Gurkha Rifles: Church Crookham;

Gurkha Demonstration Company: Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst;

Gurkha Demonstration Company: Brecon;

Queen's Gurkha Engineers: Maidstone;

Queen's Gurkha Signals: Blandford;

Queen's Own Gurkha Transport Regiment: Colchester

Three Gurkha reinforcement companies will be allocated to the following battalions stationed as follows:

First Battalion, The Royal Scots: Colchester;

First Battalion, The Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment: Canterbury;

Second Battalion, The Parachute Regiment: Aldershot.

There will also be some Gurkhas stationed elsewhere on individual postings or attending training courses.

We intend that the Gurkhas' remuneration will be broadly equivalent to that of British troops of similar rank.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many wives and children of Gurkha troops will be returning to Nepal as a result of the handover of Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement. [3206]

Mr. Soames: Between June 1996 and June 1997 some 359 wives and children of Gurkha troops will have returned to Nepal as a direct result of the drawdown. In addition, 74 dependants of those Gurkha soldiers who have completed their service will return to Nepal, and a further seven will return as a result of postings to other units. Future arrangements for married accompanied service for Gurkhas are under review.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received regarding the Gurkha troops who will be moving to Britain; and if he will make a statement. [3207]

Mr. Soames: I have received a number of representations regarding the move of Gurkha troops from Hong Kong to the United Kingdom. Possible changes to the terms and conditions of service of Gurkha soldiers are under review.

Channel Islands (Wartime Occupation)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when further documents on the wartime occupation of the Channel Islands are due to be released into the public domain; and if he will make a statement. [3668]

Mr. Soames: A number of previously closed files concerning the wartime occupation of the Channel Islands will be made available at the Public Record Office on 19 November 1996.

Performance Measurements

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how his Department performed against performance measurements in the period 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996; and if he will make a statement. [3887]

Mr. Soames: My Department has today published a performance report covering the period 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Private Sector Contracts

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total value of his Department's contracts with the private sector; and how many people are employed to carry out those contracts. [3239]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department publishes each year in table 1.14 of "UK Defence Statistics", a copy of which is in the Library of the House, details of numbers and values of contracts placed by headquarters contract branches. Table 1.10 of the same publication gives estimates of the number of UK jobs dependent on my Department's expenditure.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons, his Department does not collate information on the number of written and oral parliamentary answers issued by his Department that require correction. [3222]

Mr. Soames: Where a correction to a parliamentary answer is necessary, it is usually our practice for this to be done by means of a pursuant answer in the *Official Report*. My Department has not thought it necessary to record such corrections centrally.

Quadrilateral Armaments Structure

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on the quadrilateral armaments structure with France, Germany and Italy; and if he will make a statement. [3975]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am pleased to announce that today the UK signed a memorandum of understanding for the establishment of a quadrilateral armaments agency with France, Germany and Italy. The UK is now fully involved on an equal basis in the agency's formation, operation and subsequent development. This important initiative will lead to a more efficient and effective approach to the management of collaborative defence programmes.

TRANSPORT

Mr. Kashieris

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the circumstances leading to the injury to Mr. Kashieris of Isleworth on 1 June 1993; if he will investigate the work of the Civil Aviation Authority in attempting to identify the aircraft involved; and if he will ensure that Mr. Kashieris is compensated. [3790]

Mr. Bowis: My noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping wrote to my hon. Friend about this on 20 October 1995. There have been no new developments since that time.

Traffic Area Boundaries (Manchester)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations the Minister for Transport in London, local transport and road safety has received from the leader of Manchester city council on redrawing the traffic area boundaries; what reply he is sending; what action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement. [2034]

Mr. Bowis: Two letters dated 30 July and 3 October have been received from the leader of Manchester city council about redrawing the traffic area boundaries. Replies were sent on 10 August and 20 October respectively. I hope to make an announcement about traffic area boundaries shortly.

Motor Cycle Licences

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will repeal the provision to suspend motor cycle licences upon failure to pass a test at the same time as implementing the provisions of the second EC directive on driving licences. [3083]

Mr. Bowis: The provision under which licences are suspended if a motor cycle test is not passed within two years was introduced in 1981 in order to improve motor cycle safety by providing an incentive for learner motor cyclists to take training and become qualified early in their riding careers. There are no plans to repeal it.

Fuel Duty

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what factors underlie the differential in fuel duty between private bus companies and private rail companies. [2600]

Mr. Bowis: In 1993, operators of rail passenger services were charged duty on diesel at a rate of 2.33p per litre. Bus operators of registered local bus services were eligible for fuel duty rebate and effectively paid no duty on diesel. In 1993, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer froze the level of fuel duty rebate for buses at 25.14p per litre. This coincided with the strategy of increasing fuel duty by on average at least 5 per cent. per annum above inflation every year, to contribute to the UK's Rio target that levels of carbon dioxide emissions should be at 1990 levels in 2000. It was important that the UK bus industry also played its part in improving fuel efficiency and in meeting the Rio target. It would not be possible for the red diesel scheme set up for rail, agricultural and construction uses to be applied to buses, or to charge different rates of duty for different uses of red diesel. This creates practical difficulties in changing the taxation of diesel used by rail in response to changes in the fuel duty regime for buses.

Civil Aviation Accidents and Incidents

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he has taken to implement Council directive 94/56/EC establishing the fundamental principles governing the investigation of civil aviation accidents and incidents. [3997]

Mr. Bowis: This directive will be implemented by the Civil Aviation (Investigation of Air Accidents and Incidents) Regulations 1996 which come into effect on 21 November 1996.

Civil Aviation Authority

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what objectives he has set for the new chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority. [3974]

Sir George Young: I wrote to Sir Malcolm Field on 11 November and have today placed a copy of my letter in the Library.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Members of the European Parliament

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will arrange for *(a)* a register of MEPs' interests, *(b)* a list of MEPs' attendance records and *(c)* copies of debates in the European Parliament to be placed in the Library. [3242]

Mr. David Davis: *(a)* The European Parliament agreed arrangements for a register of Members' interests in July 1996. We understand that the register will be complete around the end of the year.

Arrangements for consulting the register have not been finalised.

(b) Attendance at European Parliament sessions is recorded in the Parliament's minutes, which are placed in the House Library.

(c) Minutes of European Parliament debates and other business are already placed in the Library.

Visas

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the range of charges for applications for visas; what is the average cost of processing each application; what is the reason for the policy of making no refunds, in whole or in part, in the event of an application being refused; and what was the difference between the income from visa applications and the expenditure in processing them in the last year for which figures are available. [2035]

Dr. Liam Fox: Details of the fees for receiving applications for entry clearance for the United Kingdom are given in the Consular Fees Order 1996, SI 1996 No. 1915. The average cost of processing an application ranges from £25 for a direct airside transit visa to £230 for a settlement visa. Application fees are not refundable because it is Government policy to recover the full cost of processing an application irrespective of the outcome. However, if at a preliminary assessment stage the entry clearance officer believes that an application probably will not succeed, the applicant is informed and given the opportunity to decide not to make a formal application. In

that case, no fee is paid. In 1995–96, the income from fees was £42 million; the global entry clearance operation cost £48 million.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many potential applicants in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* January to October 1996 seeking visitors' visas at (i) Islamabad, (ii) Delhi, (iii) Bombay and (iv) Lagos have been advised not to pursue their application; and if he will make a statement. [3209]

Dr. Fox: The numbers of entry clearance applicants who, following preliminary assessment advice, chose not to proceed were:

	Islamabad	*Delhi*	*Bombay*	*Lagos*
1995	13,717	6,101	4,260	348
January–September 1996	10,643	4,905	2,618	0

Statistics of those who were advised not to pursue their applications, but who nevertheless chose to do so, are not recorded.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the number of pre-sifted withdrawals for entry clearance from *(a)* Islamabad, *(b)* New Delhi, *(c)* Bombay and *(d)* Lagos for 1995; and if he will make a statement. [3208]

Dr. Liam Fox: The numbers of entry clearance applicants who following preliminary assessment advice chose not to proceed were:

	Islamabad	*Delhi*	*Bombay*	*Lagos*
1995	13,717	6,101	4,260	348

Iraq

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on missing Kuwait prisoners of war held in Iraq. [3172]

Mr. Hanley: Britain remains concerned about the plight of over 600 Kuwaitis and other nationals missing in Iraq since the Gulf war. We strongly support Kuwait's efforts through the International Committee of the Red Cross to establish the whereabouts of its missing citizens and will continue to play an active role.

Sadly, the Iraqis continue to show no interest in making progress. We have made it clear to Iraq that this is unacceptable.

I discussed this issue with Ministers in Kuwait in October.

Diplomatic Appointments

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what restrictions his Department places on the religious affiliation permissible to a head of mission to the state of Israel. [3339]

Mr. Hanley: There are no restrictions on the religious affiliation of a British ambassador accredited to the state of Israel.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons his Department appoints only non-Roman Catholics as head of mission to the Holy See. [3338]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 11 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *428*.

Sri Lanka

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures his Department is taking to prevent human rights abuses against Tamils in Sri Lanka. [3516]

Dr. Liam Fox: We believe that the Sri Lankan Government have made genuine efforts to improve their human rights record, which was very poor under the previous Government. Reports of abuses cause us great concern. We have raised our concern with the Sri Lankan Government on a number of occasions, most recently during the visit by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and by me, and stressed the importance of ensuring that violators are prosecuted.

Non-co-operation Policy

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the measures from which the Government withheld agreement in the Council of Ministers under their policy of non-co-operation which have not yet been agreed. [3672]

Mr. David Davis: As a consequence of the policy of non-co-operation announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 21 May, the UK did not sign the EC convention on insolvency proceedings. The deadline for signatures passed on 23 May.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Traffic Police (South Yorkshire)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have been dedicated to traffic division operations in each of the past five years in the South Yorkshire police force; and what percentage this is of the total South Yorkshire police force. [2674]

Mr. Maclean: The information is as follows:

	Police strength: traffic operational	*Percentage of total police strength*
1991	205	6.84
1992	189	6.30
1993	169	5.61
1994	182	5.99
1995	189	6.14

Crime Statistics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list by year for each of the last five years, and by sex, the number of persons successfully convicted under section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988; [2721]

(2) how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been successfully convicted under (i) section 1 and (ii) section 139 of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 in each of the last five years. [2722]

Mr. Maclean: The information is given in the table.

Number of persons convicted at all courts for offences involving carrying weapons by sex 1991 to 1995

England and Wales

Offence description/sex	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Carrying article with blade or point in a public place (Criminal Justice Act 1988, section 139)					
Males	1,671	1,778	1,783	2,424	2,469
Females	66	70	69	78	90
Carrying of offensive weapons[1] without lawful authority or reasonable excuse in a public place (Prevention of Crime Act 1953, section 1)					
Males	3,785	3,490	3,028	3,186	3,063
Females	122	116	90	109	127

[1]May include a small number of offences involving truncheons etcetera.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes ended in a court conviction in each police force area of England and Wales in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995. [2232]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* Information available centrally on the number of offenders found guilty is published annually in "Criminal Statistics England and Wales", supplementary tables, volume 3. Tables S3.2(A) and S3.4(A) refer to that subject.

Copies of the publication are available in the Library.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes ended in a caution in each police force area of England and Wales in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995. [2233]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* Information available centrally on the number of offenders cautioned is published annually in "Criminal Statistics England and Wales", supplementary tables, volume 3. Table S3.6(A) refers to that subject.

Copies of the publication are available in the Library.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes were cleared up by the police in each police force area of England and Wales in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995. [2234]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* The information requested is given in the following table.

Notifiable offences cleared up[1] by police force area

Police force area	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Avon and Somerset	29,769	34,226	35,008
Bedfordshire	12,110	11,377	11,142
Cambridgeshire	16,375	15,019	12,626
Cheshire	19,875	22,049	22,329
Cleveland	19,758	14,429	18,180
Cumbria	15,677	14,657	15,639
Derbyshire	18,278	17,891	16,434
Devon and Cornwall	30,534	29,257	27,771
Dorset	17,073	16,373	14,765
Durham	18,663	19,041	16,113
Essex	35,991	37,691	31,404
Gloucestershire	12,134	14,493	14,928
Greater Manchester	116,938	105,157	71,314
Hampshire	37,223	36,905	36,552
Hertfordshire	12,039	13,044	15,270
Humberside	22,399	23,291	24,347
Kent	40,163	43,338	40,348
Lancashire	41,211	36,356	37,607
Leicestershire	27,391	28,817	26,924
Lincolnshire	18,755	15,062	17,878
London, City of	1,225	1,406	1,325
Merseyside	54,101	45,328	40,998
Metropolitan Police	146,342	175,105	187,671
Norfolk	17,664	18,936	15,758
Northamptonshire	16,294	17,595	15,948
Northumbria	38,227	40,340	39,034
North Yorkshire	16,816	14,542	13,816
Nottinghamshire	44,789	40,708	33,897
South Yorkshire	30,247	36,669	35,589
Staffordshire	28,602	28,496	29,179
Suffolk	15,571	13,603	12,831
Surrey	10,604	14,119	13,649
Sussex	25,391	24,991	29,297
Thames Valley	40,948	41,174	41,210
Warwickshire	9,665	10,202	9,725
West Mercia	23,035	23,957	21,971
West Midlands	86,809	77,531	75,279
West Yorkshire	54,073	58,167	59,012
Wiltshire	14,395	13,433	11,455
Dyfed-Powys	11,518	10,501	10,147
Gwent	17,411	17,699	16,093
North Wales	16,899	16,416	13,336
South Wales	45,173	36,975	43,076
England and Wales	1,328,155	1,326,366	1,276,875

[1] Excludes criminal damage £20 and under.

Police

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on *(a)* the terms of reference of his Department's review of the area cost adjustment as applied to the police service, *(b)* the alternative methods of measuring the local costs of policing which are being considered to replace the area cost adjustment, *(c)* the nature of the proposed regional salary premium for the police service and *(d)* the date on which the outcome of this review will be published. [2896]

Mr. Maclean: We have commissioned no such review, but the review of the area cost adjustment commissioned by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration considered the adjustment as it affects all local authority services including the police. The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member

for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), announced the publication of the report of the review on 12 July, column *350, and a copy has been placed in the Library.*

The report proposed that all local authority services should receive a regional pay premium to reflect the difference in average wages in different parts of the country. The police and local authority associations are being consulted about the recommendations. No further alternatives to the present adjustment for the police are currently being considered, although work continues on methods of taking into account any extra costs associated with the policing of sparsely and densely populated areas.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many full-time equivalent *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civilian staff were employed by each police authority in England and Wales; and what was each police authority's annual expenditure on the salaries and other employment costs of (i) police officers and (ii) civilian staff in the latest year for which figures are available. [2897]

Mr. Maclean: The latest available information on police and civilian staff numbers relates to those in post at 31 March 1996. The latest available data on police expenditure on salaries and other employment costs cover the financial year 1994–95. The information is set out in the tables.

Table 1: Full-time equivalent police officers and civilian staff as at 31 March 1996

England and Wales

Police force	*Police officers*	*Civilian staff*
Avon and Somerset	2,981.0	1,213.2
Bedfordshire	1,127.7	472.2
Cambridgeshire	1,238.1	529.7
Cheshire	1,997.9	689.5
City of London	869.5	324.0
Cleveland	1,420.3	553.3
Cumbria	1,115.0	407.8
Derbyshire	1,763.1	655.5
Devon and Cornwall	2,898.9	1,120.9
Dorset	1,263.0	620.5
Durham	1,401.0	530.5
Dyfed-Powys	991.0	309.5
Essex	2,884.3	1,130.0
Gloucestershire	1,132.7	415.0
Greater Manchester	4,938.0	2,748.9
Gwent	1,043.5	377.5
Hampshire	3,347.1	1,323.0
Hertfordshire	1,712.0	753.7
Humberside	2,041.0	682.7
Kent	3,120.1	1,140.9
Lancashire	3,171.0	1,349.0
Leicestershire	1,908.3	667.0
Lincolnshire	1,144.6	441.8
Merseyside	4,411.0	1,560.0
Metropolitan Police	27,343.0	14,371.5
Norfolk	1,401.0	529.2
Northamptonshire	1,152.5	511.0
Northumbria	3,668.3	1,318.8
North Wales	1,377.5	512.0
North Yorkshire	1,324.4	520.1
Nottinghamshire	2,317.7	979.1
South Wales	3,027.0	1,286.5
South Yorkshire	3,073.1	1,418.0
Staffordshire	2,208.8	753.5
Suffolk	1,137.8	485.2
Surrey	1,643.8	754.0
Sussex	3,073.5	1,131.5
Thames Valley	3,674.0	1,738.0
Warwickshire	979.0	376.1
West Mercia	2,016.8	963.7
West Midlands	7,145.1	2,780.0
West Yorkshire	5,142.0	2,036.5
Wiltshire	1,218.5	452.6
Total all forces	124,843.7	52,933.2

Table 2: Police service: expenditure on salaries and other employment costs

1994–95 outturn (£000s)	*Total police pay-related expenditure*[1]	*Total civilian pay-related expenditure*[2]
Police forces in England and Wales		
Avon and Somerset	85,316,111	19,139,213
Bedfordshire	33,140,685	7,457,656
Cambridgeshire	36,242,935	8,128,967
Cheshire	56,217,819	9,355,671
City of London	30,983,908	6,956,611
Cleveland	40,931,816	7,694,758
Cumbria	32,637,506	6,964,780
Derbyshire	54,267,941	10,016,527
Devon and Cornwall	83,887,086	18,029,887
Dorset	37,305,970	9,733,193
Durham	39,142,692	6,965,621
Dyfed-Powys	27,216,557	4,905,418
Essex	91,146,416	17,906,359
Gloucestershire	34,703,509	6,529,384
Greater Manchester	209,642,777	38,231,708
Gwent	29,576,743	4,701,197
Hampshire	100,624,081	17,244,553
Hertfordshire	48,478,580	11,264,686
Humberside	60,229,954	9,932,736
Kent	94,163,173	18,715,546
Lancashire	90,848,818	14,541,103
Leicestershire	51,620,858	11,245,407
Lincolnshire	36,042,507	7,356,684
Merseyside	138,009,293	22,924,164
Metropolitan Police[3]	886,003,000	267,568,000
Norfolk	42,573,312	8,607,065
North Wales	38,981,949	7,397,179
North Yorkshire	37,809,131	6,627,382
Northamptonshire	35,768,521	7,667,025
Northumbria	106,112,247	19,801,523
Nottinghamshire	65,261,970	14,184,376
South Wales	88,142,297	17,359,348
South Yorkshire	88,151,669	15,922,784
Staffordshire	62,084,101	9,766,539
Suffolk	36,198,568	7,689,433
Surrey	49,062,078	12,485,234
Sussex	86,111,850	18,072,982
Thames Valley	117,103,908	27,034,246
Warwickshire	31,345,249	5,557,639
West Mercia	60,839,289	12,408,662
West Midlands	201,413,195	41,182,039
West Yorkshire	143,186,706	28,458,413
Wiltshire	36,557,487	6,243,494

Source:
Home Office 1994–95 revenue expenditure grant claim forms.
Notes:
[1] Police pay and related expenditure comprises police salaries, overtime, national insurance, allowances and expenses.
[2] Civilian pay and related expenditure comprises salaries, overtime, national insurance and employers' pension contributions.
[3] Expenditure data were taken from the Metropolitan police budget and precept report 1996–97.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what adjustment was made in *(a)* percentage

and *(b)* cash terms to the budget of each police authority in England and Wales in 1996–97 as a result of the area cost adjustment. [2895]

Mr. Maclean: The area cost adjustment is applied to the share of police principal grant and standard spending assessment allocated to individual forces. The following table shows how the allocations in 1996–97 would have varied if area cost adjustment had not been applied, and there had been no change in the total amount allocated.

Effect of removing area cost adjustment factor

	Police principal grant and SSA		
	With ACA £ million	*Without ACA £ million*	*Percentage change*
Avon and Somerset	153	160	4.4
Bedfordshire	57	57	–0.2
Cambridgeshire	66	69	4.5
Cheshire	98	102	4.5
City of London	53	36	–32.2
Cleveland	73	76	4.5
Cumbria	57	59	4.4
Derbyshire	92	96	4.5
Devon and Cornwall	152	159	4.4
Dorset	64	67	4.5
Durham	71	74	4.4
Dyfed-Powys	48	50	4.5
Essex	150	147	–2.3
Gloucestershire	58	61	4.6
Greater Manchester	340	356	4.5
Gwent	62	65	4.5
Hampshire	174	174	–0.2
Hertfordshire	89	84	–5.4
Humberside	102	107	4.5
Kent	163	161	–1.0
Lancashire	162	169	4.5
Leicestershire	94	98	4.5
Lincolnshire	58	60	4.4
Merseyside	217	227	4.5
Metropolitan Police[1]	1,551	1,416	–8.7
Norfolk	75	79	4.5
North Wales	69	72	4.5
North Yorkshire	69	72	4.4
Northamptonshire	58	61	4.5
Northumbria	186	195	4.5
Nottinghamshire	114	119	4.5
South Wales	149	156	4.4
South Yorkshire	154	160	4.5
Staffordshire	108	113	4.4
Suffolk	61	64	4.4
Surrey	81	76	–6.3
Sussex	150	149	–0.6
Thames Valley	200	197	–1.9
Warwickshire	49	51	4.5
West Mercia	103	107	4.5
West Midlands	340	356	4.6
West Yorkshire	258	270	4.5
Wiltshire	60	63	4.8
Total	6,487	6,487	0.0

[1] Including a special payment of £130 million to cover national and capital city functions.

Children (Sexual Exploitation)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he plans to take in response to resolution 1099 (1996) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe concerning the sexual exploitation of children; and if he will make a statement. [2746]

Mr. Maclean: The Government are studying the terms of the recommendation, which appears broadly in line with the agenda for action adopted by the world congress against the commercial sexual exploitation of children, held in Stockholm last August. The United Kingdom played a leading role at the congress, and in encouraging other states to adopt the agenda and to bring their law and procedures into line with its requirements.

Stringent laws already exist in this country in regard both to the sexual abuse of children and to child pornography. Legislation planned for this Session of Parliament will extend that protection further by giving Untied Kingdom courts jurisdiction over acts of child sex abuse committed abroad by British nationals or residents, and by requiring paedophiles and other serious sex offenders to register changes of name and address with the police.

Death Penalty

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the Government's policy towards the sixth protocol to the European convention on human rights concerning the abolition of the death penalty; and if he will make a statement. [2747]

Mr. Maclean: The Government have no plans to review its policy towards the sixth protocol to the European convention on human rights. The Government believe that the question of the reintroduction of capital punishment for murder or its abolition for those offences for which it is still available are matters for Parliament to decide.

Television Licences

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people have been arrested for non-payment of television licence fines in each of the last five years; [2801]

(2) how many single mothers in receipt of income support have been arrested for non-payment of television licence fines in each of the last five years. [2803]

Mr. Maclean: The information is not available centrally.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce provisions to allow single mothers in receipt of income support to have free television licences. [2802]

Mr. Sproat: I have been asked to reply.

No.

Asylum and Immigration Act 1996

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now remove Pakistan from the list of designated countries under the Asylum and Immigration Act 1966; and if he will make a statement. [3042]

Mr. Kirkhope: We have no plans at present to remove Pakistan from the list.

Mr. Kenneth Noye

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions since his conviction for manslaughter in 1986 Mr. Kenneth Noye has been used by the Metropolitan police as an informer. [3276]

Mr. Maclean: This is an operational matter which is the responsibility of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

Burglary and Vehicle Thefts

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of recorded offences of *(a)* burglary in a dwelling, *(b)* burglary elsewhere, *(c)* theft of a vehicle or taking and driving away and *(d)* theft from a vehicle in each police force area of England and Wales in the year to June 1996. [2235]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is given in the following table.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police by police force area 12 months to June 1996

Police force area	*Burglary in a dwelling*	*Burglary other than a dwelling*	*Theft of a vehicle*[1]	*Theft from a vehicle*
Avon and Somerset	17,881	16,167	16,548	31,688
Bedfordshire	5,358	5,363	6,141	10,473
Cambridgeshire	6,443	8,042	7,638	14,119
Cheshire	7,808	8,698	6,488	10,006
Cleveland	12,604	10,721	8,795	11,847
Cumbria	4,101	4,816	2,309	6,792
Derbyshire	8,117	11,349	9,451	14,248
Devon and Cornwall	12,630	13,463	6,035	19,358
Dorset	6,023	5,588	3,607	9,527
Durham	6,078	7,277	6,189	6,914
Essex	7,992	11,316	9,071	16,802
Gloucestershire	6,865	6,074	4,145	12,154
Greater Manchester	50,936	35,853	46,742	48,638
Hampshire	11,089	13,601	8,749	26,699
Hertfordshire	4,519	6,446	5,839	12,886
Humberside	16,594	22,104	11,787	18,651
Kent	15,332	18,770	16,278	24,443
Lancashire	17,647	12,977	9,109	22,275
Leicestershire	13,597	12,143	9,979	16,358
Lincolnshire	5,210	6,906	3,377	5,934
City of London	31	556	114	513
Merseyside	20,133	12,158	19,009	18,423
Metropolitan Police	100,497	65,069	57,871	110,810
Norfolk	5,013	7,416	3,464	8,194
Northamptonshire	7,126	6,803	6,495	9,122
Northumbria	24,250	24,423	19,977	21,927
North Yorkshire	7,146	8,831	5,346	9,587
Nottinghamshire	18,147	17,367	15,161	18,891
South Yorkshire	23,559	22,483	23,016	24,052
Staffordshire	12,380	12,246	9,058	13,941
Suffolk	2,790	4,021	2,140	5,113
Surrey	3,922	4,873	2,787	8,154
Sussex	11,582	10,626	7,069	19,417
Thames Valley	19,301	18,708	18,088	38,274
Warwickshire	3,748	5,210	4,207	7,283
West Mercia	6,996	7,719	7,143	15,464
West Midlands	47,621	45,147	48,140	52,862
West Yorkshire	54,257	35,007	33,846	42,419
Wiltshire	3,586	3,933	1,907	5,995
Dyfed-Powys	1,296	2,086	999	2,043
Gwent	3,311	4,202	3,172	5,823
North Wales	3,429	5,902	2,267	7,147
South Wales	13,974	20,457	22,104	24,340
England and Wales	630,919	582,917	511,657	809,606

[1]Includes aggravated vehicle taking and unauthorised taking of a vehicle.

Immigration

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many applications to enter the United Kingdom for temporary purposes have been made in each year since 1994; how many have been refused; and if he will list the refusal rate for each year as a percentage of the whole; [3336]

(2) if he will list the number of refusals for applications to enter the United Kingdom for temporary purposes according to geographical region or country in each year since 1992; and if he will list the refusal rate for each year and geographical region as a percentage of the whole; [3337]

(3) if he will list the number of known applications and refusals for entry clearance to the United Kingdom in 1995; and if he will make a statement. [3334]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information on applications to enter the United Kingdom, refusals and the refusal rate, 1994–95, is contained in table 1.

Information on refusals to enter the United Kingdom for temporary purposes by geographical region, 1992 to 1995, is contained in table 2.

Table 1: Entry clearance applications, 1994–95

United Kingdom — *Number of persons*

	Entry clearance applications			
	Newly received	*Total granted*[1]	*Refused initially*[2]	*Initial refusal rate percentage*[3]
Temporary purposes				
1994	1,086,940	980,600	64,420	6
1995	1,168,240	1,044,590	72,640	7
Settlement				
1994	47,800	35,250	9,690	22
1995	44,600	33,830	10,890	24

[1]Granted initially or on appeal.

[2]Some may have been granted subsequently on appeal.

[3]Calculated as the number of initial refusals as a proportion of total decisions.

Table 2: Decisions on entry clearance applications worldwide, by geographical region, 1992–95

United Kingdom — *Number of persons*

Geographical region where application made[2]	Granted[3]				Refused initially[4]				Entry clearance applications for temporary purposes[1] Initial refusal rate percentage[5]			
	1992	1993	1994	1995	1992	1993	1994	1995	1992	1993	1994	1995
Europe	214,040	236,750	281,820	309,900	9,820	10,470	10,870	13,160	4	4	4	4
Europe Economic Area	74,500	77,160	82,600	80,640	2,380	3,040	2,850	2,390	3	4	3	3
Remainder of Europe	139,540	159,580	199,220	229,260	7,440	7,430	8,020	10,770	5	4	4	4
Americas	62,980	67,220	76,960	76,850	1,180	1,130	1,380	1,090	2	2	2	1
Africa	106,150	106,690	114,840	117,380	24,760	20,450	20,450	20,980	19	16	15	15
Indian sub-continent	135,890	136,020	152,070	160,500	21,420	18,760	23,510	27,130	14	12	14	4
Middle East	108,630	126,190	134,100	136,100	5,230	4,800	4,480	6,330	5	4	3	4
Remainder of Asia	160,360	174,920	200,520	214,220	5,240	4,450	3,680	3,930	3	2	2	2
Asia	406,370	437,130	486,700	510,820	31,990	28,010	31,670	37,390	7	6	6	7
Oceania	12,390	13,770	20,040	29,400	60	40	50	30	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—
Other	1,600	270	240	250	20	[6]—	[6]—	—	1	1	[6]—	—
All countries	803,520	861,810	980,600	1,044,590	67,830	60,100	64,420	72,640	8	7	6	7

[1] Nationals of certain counties currently need a visa to enter the United Kingdom regardless of the purpose of their journey.
[2] Some applications, particularly many of those in EEA countries, will have been made by nationals of other countries.
[3] Granted initially or on appeal.
[4] Some may have been granted subsequently on appeal.
[5] Calculated as the number of initial refusals as a proportion of total decisions.
[6] Five or fewer (less than 0.5 per cent.).

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people who had obtained entry clearance as visitors prior to travelling to the United Kingdom were refused entry on arrival in 1995. [3335]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information available relates to the total number of persons with an entry clearance or work permit who were refused leave to enter at ports in the United Kingdom. There were 1,260 such persons in 1995.

Citizenship

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what right to British citizenship a child of British parents, adopted in babyhood by a couple of other nationality and brought up by them retains; and if he will make a statement. [3558]

Mr. Kirkhope: A child who is a British citizen at birth retains that status irrespective of the nationality of his or her adoptive parents, unless, when of full age, he or she voluntarily renounces it.

Animal Head Transplants

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated in respect of experiments involving the transplantation of heads from one animal to another; and if he will make a statement. [3596]

Mr. Sackville: None.

Repatriations

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 5 November, *Official Report*, column *440*, if he will clarify the final sentence of paragraph 1. [3785]

Miss Widdecombe: I regret that, due to an error, the meaning of the original answer was unclear. The sentence in question should have read:

> "Repatriation is subject to the agreement of both states concerned, as well as of the prisoner, following consideration of all the relevant information".

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the members of the selection committee who appointed the chairman of the Criminal Cases Review Commission and, for each, the outside interests which they declared. [3706]

Mr. Kirkhope: The Criminal Appeal Act 1965 provides for the members of the Criminal Cases Review Commission to be appointed by Her Majesty on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. The panel which advised on the selection of the chairman of the commission consisted of Mr. Richard Wilson, permanent under-secretary of state at the Home Office; Mr. David Burr, a civil service commissioner; Professor Sir John Smith, former assessor to Sir John May's inquiry into the convictions arising from the 1974 Guildford and Woolwich bombings; and Sir David Yardley, former chairman of the Commission for Local Administration in England. None of the members of the panel declared an outside interest.

Correspondence

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Barking of 4 September, 26 September and 4 October. [3707]

Mr. Kirkhope: I will be replying to the hon. Member very shortly.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

7 Millbank (Newspapers)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what estimate he has made of the cost of the theft of newspapers from the foyer of 7 Millbank over the last 12 months. [2653]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The estimated face value of newspapers removed is £520 per year. This estimated annual "cost", based on nine newspapers removed daily, is slightly misleading, given that by their very nature newspapers have a value only on the day of publication.

Initiatives have been taken to reduce the loss, but they do require the co-operation of all hon. Members.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what estimate he has made of the cost of fitting wooden library newspaper holders for daily newspapers in the foyer of 7 Millbank; and if he will make a statement. [2654]

Mr. Martin: The item concerned was taken from stock purchased five years ago. Its cost did not exceed £50.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Zaire

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what requests Her Majesty's Government have received from the United Nations or its agencies to investigate the supply of arms from the United Kingdom to the Hutu refugees or other groups in Zaire; when these requests were received; what steps have been taken to undertake such investigations; and when Her Majesty's Government responded to the United Nations. [3610]

Dr. Liam Fox: The Government have a record of having received one letter, dated 12 September 1996, from the United Nations commission of inquiry regarding the supply of arms to the former Rwandan armed forces. Her Majesty's Customs and Excise has not at this stage found evidence to support criminal proceedings in the UK, but will continue to co-operate with the United Nations commission, will investigate as appropriate any new allegations and is responding to the inquiry already made.

UN Refugee Camps

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list United Nations refugee camps on the African continent indicating the number of refugees they hold at the most recent available date; and if he will make a statement. [3177]

Dr. Liam Fox: The numbers of refugees in UN camps on the continent of Africa within individual countries are shown in the table. Figures for individual camps within countries are not held centrally.

Refugee population by country 1995

	Number 000's
Algeria	219.1
Angola	10.7
Benin	70.4
Burkina Faso	50.0
Burundi	300.3
Cameroon	44.0
Central African Republic	47.8
Congo	15.5
Côte d'Ivoire	360.1
Djibouti	33.4
Egypt	7.2
Ethiopia	348.1
Gambia	2.2
Ghana	113.7
Guinea	553.2
Guinea–Bassau	23.9
Kenya	252.4
Liberia	120.0
Libya	2.0
Malawi	90.2
Mali	15.8
Mauritania	82.2
Namibia	1.1
Niger	15.1
Nigeria	6.0
Rwanda	6.0
Senegal	73.0
Sierra Leone	15.9
South Africa	91.9
Sudan	727.2
Tanzania	883.3
Togo	12.4
Uganda	286.5
Zaire	1,724.4
Zambia	141.1
Zimbabwe	2.2
Other Countries	3.7
Total Africa region	6,752.0

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the United Nations refugee camps in the Gulf area indicating the number of refugees they contain at the most recent date; and if he will make a statement. [3174]

Dr. Fox: The numbers of refugees in UN camps in the Gulf area within individual countries are shown in the table. Figures for individual camps within countries are not held centrally.

	Number 000's
Iran	2,236.4
Iraq	119.6
Saudi Arabia	18.0
Total Gulf region	2,374.0

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the value of the contract awarded to Capita Managed Services to administer the national implementation of the voucher scheme; and what is the length of the contract period. [2762]

Mr. Robin Squire: The cost of administering the nursery education voucher scheme will be around £15 million over three years—a cost of less than £10 per child.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she plans to publish her report on phase 1 of the nursery education voucher scheme. [4092]

Mr. Squire: A report on the first phase of the nursery voucher scheme is being published tomorrow morning. Copies of the report will be placed in the Library by 9.30 am.

Education Expenditure

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was (i) the actual spending per pupil in each local education authority and (ii) the education standard spending assessment per pupil in *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools and *(c)* total in 1996–97. [2758]

Mr. Robin Squire: Actual spending per pupil for 1996–97 will not be known until the year has ended. The following table shows the 1996–97 education standard spending assessment per pupil in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools for each local education authority, and *(c)* the England averages.

LEA	Primary SSA per pupil 1996–97 £	Secondary SSA per pupil 1996–97 £
Barking and Dagenham	2,273	3,057
Barnet	2,203	2,897
Barnsley	1,955	2,617
Bath and North East Somerset	1,880	2,462
Bedfordshire	2,057	2,750
Berkshire	2,047	2,733
Bexley	2,124	2,831
Birmingham	2,173	2,907
Bolton	1,958	2,603
Bradford	2,070	2,777
Brent	2,554	3,504
Bromley	2,074	2,744
Buckinghamshire	2,021	2,715
Bury	1,909	2,517
Calderdale	1,986	2,650
Cambridgeshire	1,962	2,615
Camden	2,841	3,596
Cheshire	1,903	2,529
City of Bristol	2,011	2,759
City of Kingston upon Hull	2,080	2,789
City of London	2,736	7,422
Cornwall	1,984	2,644
Coventry	2,049	2,731
Croydon	2,277	3,089
Cumbria	1,957	2,598
Derbyshire	1,911	2,555
Devon	1,958	2,609
Doncaster	2,039	2,719
Dorset	1,909	2,536
Dudley	1,896	2,526
Durham	1,983	2,649
Ealing	2,378	3,246
East Riding of Yorkshire	1,890	2,517
East Sussex	2,043	2,728
Enfield	2,289	3,034
Essex	2,055	2,749
Gateshead	2,006	2,691
Gloucestershire	1,912	2,542
Greenwich	2,716	3,620
Hackney	2,991	4,207
Hammersmith and Fulham	2,808	3,701
Hampshire	1,989	2,657
Haringey	2,631	3,599
Harrow	2,194	2,951
Hartlepool	2,010	2,673
Havering	2,104	2,816
Hereford and Worcester	1,914	2,556
Hertfordshire	2,074	2,754
Hillingdon	2,195	2,930
Hounslow	2,341	3,072
Isle of Wight Council	2,070	2,755
Isles of Scilly	3,574	4,794
Islington	2,865	3,889
Kensington and Chelsea	2,628	3,605
Kent	2,032	2,714
Kingston upon Thames	2,108	2,787
Kirklees	1,971	2,637
Knowsley	2,231	3,055
Lambeth	3,024	4,431
Lancashire	1,964	2,616
Leeds	1,947	2,597
Leicestershire	1,954	2,601
Lewisham	2,803	3,769
Lincolnshire	1,969	2,630
Liverpool	2,203	2,924
Manchester	2,320	3,141
Merton	2,216	2,948
Middlesbrough	2,109	2,859
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,104	2,793
Newham	2,620	3,490
Norfolk	1,971	2,630
North East Lincolnshire	1,982	2,638
North Lincolnshire	1,965	2,595
North Somerset	1,863	2,462
North Tyneside	1,946	2,620
North Yorkshire	1,940	2,560
Northamptonshire	1,927	2,568
Northumberland	1,935	2,582
Nottinghamshire	1,973	2,630
Oldham	2,008	2,646
Oxfordshire	1,985	2,625
Redbridge	2,241	2,970
Redcar and Cleveland	2,042	2,698
Richmond upon Thames	2,040	2,660
Rochdale	2,017	2,711
Rotherham	1,978	2,609
Salford	2,047	2,747
Sandwell	2,051	2,734
Sefton	1,955	2,590
Sheffield	1,996	2,679
Shropshire	1,952	2,596
Solihull	1,872	2,468
Somerset	1,933	2,580
South Gloucestershire	1,834	2,442
South Tyneside	2,012	2,681
Southwark	2,926	3,933
St. Helens	1,945	2,609
Staffordshire	1,894	2,520
Stockport	1,863	2,482
Stockton on Tees	1,981	2,622
Suffolk	1,901	2,538
Sunderland	2,001	2,673
Surrey	2,040	2,723
Sutton	2,162	2,829
Tameside	1,908	2,530
Tower Hamlets	3,052	4,051
Trafford	1,905	2,518
Wakefield	1,910	2,536
Walsall	1,991	2,634
Waltham Forest	2,484	3,348
Wandsworth	2,654	3,551
Warwickshire	1,906	2,543
West Sussex	1,987	2,647
Westminster	2,667	3,470
Wigan	1,905	2,523
Wiltshire	1,921	2,561
Wirral	2,024	2,690
Wolverhampton	2,081	2,807
York	1,888	2,533
England—average	2,053	2,728

Former Incapacity Benefit Claimants

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what research her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the employment needs of people who have previously claimed incapacity benefit; [2771]

(2) what assessment she has made of the similarities and differences between the employment needs of people registering as unemployed who were formerly incapacity benefit claimants who *(a)* first claimed incapacity benefit after April 1995 and *(b)* formerly were on invalidity benefit before 1995. [2772]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 12 November 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the research and evaluation which has been commissioned into the employment needs of people who have previously claimed Incapacity Benefit (IB). You also asked what assessment has been made of the similarities and differences between the employment needs of people registering as unemployed who were formally IB claimants, who first claimed IB after April 1995 and those who were on Invalidity Benefit before 1995. I will answer both questions in this one reply. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The needs of people who have previously claimed a sickness benefit have been examined by Employment Service (ES) Occupational Psychology Division. This work compared the needs of those people who had been disallowed IB (which we refer to as ex-IB) at the time they make a claim to unemployment benefit with those of other jobseekers at the same point. It was hoped that through this work it would be possible to identify whether ex-IB jobseekers had different employment needs so that the package of help that the ES offers these people could be reviewed to ensure that it is correctly focused. This package of help includes a full advisory interview when they first make their claim, early access to ES programmes such as Jobplan and Jobclub and, if appropriate, help from our specialist disabilities services.

The work by our Psychologists showed that this was a diverse group with a wide range of employment and [illegible] seeking needs. It did not specifically compare those who had been on Invalidity Benefit (IVB) with those who made a claim to IB after April 1995, but looked across the board, finding that other personal factors influenced need rather than purely the time that they had been claiming a sickness benefit and the nature of that benefit.

The psychologists found that the full advisory interview was valuable and that ES programmes could meet the needs of many of these people. The work has led ES to consider the possibility of a specially tailored programme for people who have previously claimed a sickness benefit, should the future volumes of such clients warrant it. The work of the psychologists has also enabled us to provide additional guidance for our advisers dealing with people who have claimed Incapacity Benefit.

I hope this is helpful.

Safety Measures (Guidance)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance she plans to issue to local education authorities and schools on the development of action plans for implementing and monitoring the effectiveness of safety measures. [2753]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department produces a wide range of safety guidance for local education authorities and schools, for example, on improving school security, safety aspects of outdoor education and safety in science education.

Schools (Selection Applications)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools have applied to select more than 15 per cent. of their intake; and in each case if she will list *(a)* the percentage selected, *(b)* the selection criteria and *(c)* the status of the schools concerned. [2754]

Mr. Robin Squire: Since 1989, 25 schools have applied to select more than 15 per cent. of their intake. The following table lists the percentage of selection, the selection criteria, and whether the proposals were approved, rejected, or are still under consideration.

LEA area	*School name*	*Selection*
Approved		
Grant maintained		
Barnet	Queen Elizabeth Boys' School	100 per cent. including 10 per cent. by aptitude for music
Barnet	Mill Hill County High School	30 per cent. by aptitude for technology
Berkshire	Southlands School	One selective form of entry (18 per cent.)
Cumbria	Queen Elizabeth Grammar School	100 per cent. by ability
Hammersmith and Fulham	London Oratory School	20 boys at age 7 on musical and general ability
Hertfordshire	Watford Grammar School for Girls	50 per cent. selection by ability
Hertfordshire	Watford Grammar School for Boys	50 per cent. selection by ability
Hertfordshire	Parmiters School	50 per cent. selection by ability
Hertfordshire	Rickmansworth School	50 per cent. selection by ability
Kent	Chaucer Technology School	100 per cent. by aptitude for technology
Kingston	Holy Cross School	15 per cent. selection by ability
Lambeth	Archbishop Tenison's GM school	{*B}banding including
Lambeth	St. Martin in the Fields High School	{*B}40 per cent. of above average
Lambeth	Dunraven GM School	{*B}ability
Surrey	Roseberry GM Girls' School	30 per cent. selection on academic ability and 10 places on aptitude for music
Wandsworth	Graveney GM School	50 per cent. selection by ability
Wandsworth	Burntwood School	50 per cent. selection by ability
Voluntary aided		
Liverpool	The Blue Coat School	100 per cent. selection by ability
Rejected		
Grant maintained		
Hertfordshire	The Bishop's Stortford High School	50 per cent. selectionby ability
Kent	The Westlands School	One selective form of entry (11 per cent.)
Kirklees	Castle Hall GM School	100 per cent. selection by ability

LEA area	School name	Selection
Lambeth	Dunraven GM School	50 per cent. selection by ability
Surrey	Glyn ADT GM Technology School	40 per cent. selection by aptitude for technology
Sutton	Cheam High School	50 per cent. selection by ability
Under consideration		
Grant maintained		
Bromley	Hayes School	25 per cent. selection by ability

Nursery Education

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many three and four-year-olds were in *(a)* nursery classes in primary schools, *(b)* nursery schools and *(c)* reception classes at January 1996. [2756]

Mr. Robin Squire: The available information is shown in the following table:

Pupils aged 3 and 4 in maintained nursery and primary schools in England

Position as at January

Nursery classes in primary schools	312,094
Nursery schools	52,177
Infant classes in primary schools[1]	344,222

[1]Includes reception and other classes.

Jobseeker's Agreement

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her estimate of the costs to the Employment Service of administration of the jobseeker's agreement. [2770]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 12 November 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the costs to the Employment Service of administration of the Jobseeker's Agreement. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The Jobseeker's Agreement is an integral part of the effective delivery of the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). It is an agreement which is entered into by a Jobseeker and an employment officer and which complies with the prescribed requirements in force at the time when the agreement is made.

The Jobseeker must sign the agreement which states their availability for, and what they will do to actively seek employment. The Jobseeker's Agreement is used during the Jobseeker's intervention to discuss their efforts to find work.

However, the agreement is only one aspect of an intervention under JSA, and therefore it is not possible to separately identify the cost of administering just the Jobseeker's Agreement within the overall costs of Jobseeker's Allowance.

I hope this is helpful.

Books Expenditure

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average amount spent per pupil on books, for each of the past five years, broken down by (i) special schools, (ii) primary schools and (iii) secondary schools. [2763]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows expenditure per pupil on books and equipment for local education authority maintained (i) special, (ii) pre-primary and primary, and (iii) secondary schools from 1990–91 to 1994–95, the latest year for which figures are available. Spending on books is not recorded separately.

Books and equipment cost per pupil

	£
Special	
1990–91	177
1991–92	236
1992–93	255
1993–94	241
1994–95	249
Pre-primary and primary	
1990–91	41
1991–92	54
1992–93	59
1993–94	62
1994–95	64
Secondary	
1990–91	80
1991–92	93
1992–93	98
1993–94	102
1994–95	103

Age Limits

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will introduce legislation to eliminate job advertisements specifying age limits, except where reasons are given for them; and if she will make a statement. [3189]

Mrs. Gillan: The Government are convinced that the best way to combat age discrimination is through persuasion and education and they do not intend to introduce legislation to eliminate job advertisements specifying age limits.

Pupils

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the school population of primary and secondary schools in England and Wales in each academic year since 1978–79. [3179]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information for England is shown in the following table. Pupil numbers in Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Numbers of pupils (millions) in maintained primary and secondary schools in England

Position in January each year

Year	*Primary*	*Secondary*[1]
1979	4.52	3.82
1980	4.36	3.81
1981	4.18	3.78
1982	4.01	3.73
1983	3.84	3.67
1984	3.77	3.58
1985	3.75	3.46
1986	3.76	3.32
1987	3.79	3.18
1988	3.84	3.01
1989	3.91	2.87
1990	3.98	2.79
1991	4.05	2.77
1992	4.09	2.82
1993	4.17	2.87
1994	4.24	2.93
1995	4.31	2.99
1996	4.39	3.01

[1] Excludes pupils in sixth form colleges which ceased to be classified as schools in April 1993.

Project Work

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a progress report on the project work pilot schemes. [3285]

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to extend the project work pilots; and if she will make a statement. [3237]

Mr. Forth: I am very encouraged by the results of the two current pilots of project work, which having been running since April in Hull and Medway and Maidstone. The latest information indicates that around 25 per cent. more people are leaving the unemployment register in the pilot areas than in comparable areas. Based on this encouraging evidence, the Secretary of State announced on 7 November that the project work approach was to be extended early next year to around 100,000 people in a wide range of locations in England, Scotland and Wales. The full list of areas in which the pilot will run is as follows:

Travel-to-work areas to be covered by the further pilots of the project work approach

Bath
Bolton and Bury
Bradford
Brighton
Bristol
Derby
Dudley and Sandwell
Dundee
Dunfermline
Edinburgh
Grimsby
Hertford and Harlow
Huddersfield
Lanarkshire
Leicester
London, East and North-east
Merthyr and Rhymney
Neath and Port Talbot
Norwich
Nottingham
Peterborough
Portsmouth
Preston
South Tyneside
Stoke
Swansea
Weston Super Mare
Wigan and St. Helens

The existing pilots, in Hull and Medway and Maidstone will also continue beyond July 1997.

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what estimate she has made of the effect of project work by April 1997 on the official count of claimant unemployed with durations of over two years in the *(a)* Hull travel-to-work area and *(b)* Medway and Maidstone travel-to-work areas; [3062]

(2) if people currently counted as having an unemployment duration of more than two years will continue to be classified as such on their return to the register direct from project work. [3063]

Mr. Forth: The treatment of people who claim jobseeker's allowance after a period on project work is consistent with that of people leaving training for work, or other Employment Service programmes which have involved the payment of an allowance. They will be treated as new claims for the purposes of payment of jobseeker's allowance. Those who return will continue to qualify for all ES programmes, including those for people unemployed over two years, and for training for work. The numbers of those entering and leaving project work will be made publicly available.

Collective Worship

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations she has studied from the British Humanist Association regarding collective worship; and if she will make a statement. [3190]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a letter dated 29 October from Mr. Robert Ashby, the executive director of the British Humanist Association. I have placed a copy of my reply in the Library.

Surplus School Places

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many surplus places there were in primary and secondary schools in England and Wales in each academic year since 1978–79. [3169]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is only available on a consistent basis for England for 1993–94 and 1994–95. In those years, the number of surplus places was as follows:

thousand

Year	*Primary*	*Secondary*
1993–94	541	476
1994–95	478	406

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is responsible for monitoring surplus places in Wales.

Office for Standards in Education Research

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place the recent Ofsted research into (i) the background of excluded pupils and (ii) school library provision in the Library. [3103]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Unemployment

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will publish the current unemployment rates in each European Union member state, indicating in each case whether the social chapter is in force; [2919]

(2) if she will publish the current youth unemployment rates in each European Union member state, indicating in each case whether the social chapter is in force. [2920]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* The information is set out in following table. I am pleased to confirm that, both for unemployment overall and for unemployment of people below the age of 25, the UK rate is substantially below the figure in the European Union as a whole. The UK is the only country to which the social chapter does not apply.

	Total	*Under 25 years*
Belgium	09.8	25.0
Denmark	06.1	07.9
Germany	08.9	09.7
Greece	—	—
Spain	21.3	39.2
France	12.4	28.7
Ireland	12.5	19.0
Italy	—	—
Luxembourg	03.1	07.7
Netherlands	—	—
Austria	04.1	06.1
Portugal	07.1	16.7
Finland	16.0	35.2
Sweden	09.8	22.6
UK	08.2	15.0
EU	10.8	21.1

Employment Service

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) which body established the resource baselines quoted by the chief executive of the Employment Service as a factor in the decision to make staffing reductions; [3613]

(2) what estimate she has made of the likely costs of *(a)* redundancies and *(b)* transfers occasioned by the reductions in activity in the headquarters of the Employment Service; [3612]

(3) who announced the decision to reduce activity at the Employment Service headquarters; and in what manner the announcement was made; [3608]

(4) what is *(a)* the timetable for and *(b)* the distribution of the staffing reductions at the headquarters of the Employment Service; and how many and what percentage of staff are to be lost at each divisional office; [3611]

(5) what is the staffing budget for the Employment Service in 1996–97, broken down according to grades; and what is the projected staffing budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000; [3609]

(6) what account was taken of public expenditure negotiations in respect of her Department as a whole in the decision to reduce staff activity at the Employment Service headquarters. [3607]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. David Blunkett, dated 12 November 1996:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your questions on staffing reduction in the Employment Service Headquarters. For ease of reference I have grouped my replies by subject using the numbers that will appear in Hansard.

Determination of Employment Service resources and relationship with public expenditure negotiations (questions 3613 and 3607).

In common with other Departments and Agencies, the Employment Service's resource provision is determined by Government within the public expenditure framework. As part of that framework Departments and Agencies are required to absorb pay and price increases and to improve the efficiency with which they are run. It is one of my tasks to identify and develop efficiency measures to meet these requirements. Our current work to reduce the Headquarters overhead is one strand in a programme of continuing efficiency measures designed to do that.

Announcement of decision on ES Headquarters Review and timetable/distribution of reductions (questions 3608 and 3611).

The decision concerns Agency management rather than wider policy questions. To help us plan for the future effectively and to minimise uncertainty within ES I wrote to all my colleagues in ES's Head and Regional Offices (our "Headquarters") at the earliest opportunity. As part of that process we wrote to our trade unions and offered them a meeting to discuss the matter. This meeting took place on Monday 11 November.

Detailed plans for implementing the changes are in development, but broadly I see the process as starting now and continuing through to March 2000. Reductions in posts will be spread across this period and I envisage that these could be in the order of 750 by March 1998.

The exercise encompasses my Head Office (mainly Sheffield, but also London) and 9 Regional Offices. The reductions will be spread across these locations. However, as distribution of the reduction will depend on a series of decisions over a range of functions, it is too early to say exactly where they will fall but it seems likely that more will occur in the Regions than in Sheffield. We currently have some 1,400 permanent posts in Sheffield. I should emphasise that these plans are intended to exclude the great majority of ES people who work in Jobcentres delivering services to employers and our clients seeking work.

Cost of consequent redundancies and transfers, and staffing budgets for the Employment Service (questions 3612 and 3609).

I intend to avoid redundancies if at all possible and they do not form part of our current plans. ES has a good record in managing fluctuations in staffing without recourse to compulsory redundancy and we will do everything in our power to manage these reductions in the same way. On transfers, I have said that if a member of staff is required to move they would be entitled to transfer expenses under normal rules. It is, though, too early to predict the numbers of transfers that will take place and therefore their cost. Transfer costs will, of course, be taken into account in reaching decisions on the implementation of the various changes.

The current staffing budgets and forward plans for ES are:

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Running costs	£910 million	£800 million	£798 million
Staff years	36,536	32,867	32,586

These include both paybill and general administration expenditure.

The staff numbers for the current year broken down into broad divisions are:

	Grade	*Number*
Senior management	(Grades 3–7)	292
Executive grades	(SEO–EO)	13,993
Clerical	(including temporary staff)	22,251

A breakdown of staff by grade is not available for future years. Unfortunately, the information for 1999–2000 is not yet available as the current public expenditure survey has yet to be concluded. The earlier information is published in the 1996 DfEE Departmental Report.

I hope this is helpful.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the rules and regulations she proposes to repeal or amend by means of a reference to the Deregulation Committee before the end of 1996; and if she will make a statement. [3442]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* The Department has laid today a deregulation order relating to the distribution of school action plans. The effect of the order is to reduce unnecessary burdens on schools by allowing them to send parents a summary of the school action plan, instead of the full text. This order will be considered by the Deregulation Committee in due course.

Teachers (Early Retirement)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to restrict the number of early retirements in the teaching profession. [3417]

Mrs. Gillan: I announced on 22 October consultation on a proposal to transfer directly to employers the costs of the premature retirement of teachers from 1 April 1997. This will enable employers' contribution rates to the teachers' superannuation scheme to be reduced to 7.2 per cent. of salaries instead of raised to 8.8 per cent. It will be for employers to decide how many premature retirements they want to finance. The Government think it important that schools should retain more of their experienced teachers, so as to maintain the quality of education and reduce demands on the teacher training system.

Information to Schools

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the cost of producing and circulating information sent by her Department to schools during the academic year 1995–96. [3632]

Mr. Robin Squire: To separate the cost of producing and distributing information sent to schools in 1995–96 from that sent to other educational establishments, parents, governors and the general public would involve disproportionate cost. The total cost of producing and distributing the Department's programme of education publicity in 1995–96 was some £5.4 million. Around £800,000 was spent on distribution of material from the Department's own mailing house, including some of the material covered above and a number of circulars and letters. It is not possible to disaggregate the cost of producing the latter from the Department's total copying costs.

Spanish and Portuguese Examinations

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many candidates sat GCSE examinations in *(a)* Spanish and *(b)* Portuguese in each of the last six years for which figures are available; how many passed in each year; and what was the breakdown of passes by grade. [3458]

Mrs. Gillan: The numbers of candidates that sat GCSE in *(a)* Spanish and *(b)* Portuguese in each year since 1992 and their pass grades are as follows: comparable information is not available before 1992.

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
(a) Spanish				
Number of candidates	27,334	29,370	34,341	37,970
Number achieving pass grades				
Grade A*	—	—	1,985	2,234
Grade A	7,407	7,531	6,534	6,779
Grade B	4,141	4,685	5,464	6,020
Grade C	3,764	4,102	4,899	5,841
Grade D	3,433	3,869	4,503	5,667
Grade E	2,791	2,837	3,544	3,825
Grade F	3,012	2,918	3,527	3,683
Grade G	1,514	1,987	2,154	2,014
(b) Portuguese				
Number of candidates	305	250	349	318
Number achieving pass grades				
Grade A*	—	—	40	39
Grade A	161	138	148	125
Grade B	51	39	53	63
Grade C	45	36	43	45
Grade D	22	18	24	18
Grade E	11	2	12	10
Grade F	4	3	11	5
Grade G	2	—	1	—

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many candidates sat GCE advanced level examinations in *(a)* Spanish and *(b)* Portuguese in each of the last six years for which figures are available; how many passed in each year; and what was the breakdown of passes by grade. [3512]

Mrs. Gillan: The numbers of candidates who sat GCE advanced level examinations in *(a)* Spanish and *(b)* Portuguese in each year since 1992 are as follows: comparable information is not available before 1992.

		GCE A level pass achieved				
	Number of candidates	*A*	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*
(a) Spanish						
1991–92	4,244	877	819	779	683	535
1992–93	4,363	911	858	786	713	501
1993–94	4,260	980	858	863	649	384
1994–95	4,222	910	866	810	640	461
(b) Portuguese						
1991–92	139	34	35	34	11	15
1992–93	93	31	23	15	5	9
1993–94	131	40	46	21	12	3
1994–95	120	43	26	15	14	3

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students graduated from degree courses at United Kingdom universities in which a principal subject was *(a)* study of the Spanish language and *(b)* study of the Portuguese language, in each of the last six years for which figures are available; and what projections can be made of the expected numbers in each of the next three years. [3513]

Mr. Forth: Information on students graduating in Portuguese or Spanish separately is not available for all of the years requested. The available information for the years 1990 to 1995 is given in the following table. Projections of graduates in individual subjects are not produced by the Department.

First degree graduated in Spanish, Portuguese and other Latin American languages

Year of graduation	*Numbers of graduates*[1]
1990	214
1991	211
1992	279
1993	294
1994	328
1995	328
of which:	
Spanish	232
Portuguese	1
Other Latin American languages	95

[1] Prior to 1995, the figures cover former University Funding Council funded establishments in the UK and former Polytechnic and Colleges Funding Council funded and FE establishments in England and Wales. The figures for 1995 relate to all HE institutions in the UK.

SCOTLAND

Maintenance Work

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current backlog of maintenance work in *(a)* education institutions, *(b)* prisons and police stations, *(c)* council housing, *(d)* transport infrastructure, *(e)* the national health service and *(f)* defence bases in Scotland. [2792]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Recent road condition surveys would appear to indicate that the structural integrity of the trunk road network is being maintained at an acceptable level. There is therefore no evidence that there is a maintenance backlog.

The on-going programme of maintenance work in prisons is on schedule and there is no large amount outstanding.

Information on the level of maintenance work to be carried out in education institutions, police stations, council housing, local roads and other transport infrastructure, and the NHS in Scotland is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Defence bases in Scotland are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Prescribed Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of, and how many, people admitted to hospital have been suffering from adverse reactions to a prescribed drug in each of the last five years and in age bands of 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [2907]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is shown in the table and relates to the number of discharges from hospital where an adverse reaction to "Drugs, medicaments and biological substances causing adverse effects in therapeutic use" has been recorded. It is not possible to identify centrally information relating specifically to prescribed drugs.

Hospitalisations with a diagnosis related to the adverse effects of prescribed drugs, Scotland, calendar years 1991–95

Year	*All ages*	*<10*	*10–19*	*20–29*	*30–39*	*40–49*	*50–59*	*60–69*	*70–79*	*80–89*	*90+*
Numbers											
1991	2,632	75	66	181	180	272	338	503	586	378	53
1992	2,603	66	84	210	190	228	336	524	566	352	47
1993	2,678	91	97	150	186	221	364	532	591	392	54
1994	3,031	87	109	200	229	283	413	579	648	416	67
1995	3,683	78	134	241	269	306	493	683	835	532	67
Percentages											
1991	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.4
1992	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.3
1993	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4
1994	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4
1995	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.4
Total discharges[1]											
1991	919,120	84,560	58,212	98,313	95,905	96,5[illegible]7	110,576	142,899	137,189	82,842	12,107
1992	981,213	90,766	58,506	104,040	103,456	103,672	117,262	151,669	148,656	89,595	13,537
1993	1,052,709	95,349	59,949	104,806	110,873	112,444	128,438	163,825	163,013	98,761	15,251
1994	1,097,149	96,878	61,990	105,502	117,876	119,027	136,412	171,835	169,362	102,200	16,067
1995	1,147,438	97,846	64,045	107,765	125,831	123,609	144,060	180,524	178,078	108,462	17,218

[1] Percentages are based on total discharges in each age group for each year.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the average *(a)* number of types and *(b)* quantity of preparations taken by people in Scotland in each of the last five years broken down by (i) gender and (ii) age bands of 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [2885]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No such estimate has been made.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the impact on the provision of nursery education in the pilot areas of the introduction of vouchers. [3090]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The pilot schemes of the pre-school education voucher initiative started only in August. Early indications show that a considerable number of new places have been created and early inspections by HM inspectorate confirm that there is good-quality pre-school education being offered in a wide diversity of settings. There are therefore encouraging signs that the aims of the initiative—in terms of growth, quality, and choice for parents—are being met.

A comprehensive evaluation of the operation of the pilot year schemes is being conducted by Stirling university; and the findings of the study will be taken into account in planning for national extension. The authorities involved in the pilot are also conducting their own monitoring and evaluation of the initiative; and this too will contribute to my right hon. Friend's final assessment.

Monofilament Nets

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what monitoring arrangements he is putting in place with regard to the reintroduction of monofilament gill nets. [3091]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Inshore Fishing (Monofilament Gill Nets) (Scotland) Order 1996 permits the carriage by UK-registered vessels in Scottish waters

of monofilament nets only with a mesh size greater than 250 mm. Use of these nets will not be permitted within the six-mile limit. The Scottish Office is monitoring the levels of effort in those fisheries affected by this order.

Dunblane

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what forms submitted by the late Thomas Hamilton by way of applications for the granting of firearms certificates required him to provide the names and addresses of one or more character references; if that requirement was met in full by the applicant; if in each case public office was held by any such referees cited; and if he will make a statement. [3015]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* Under the provisions of the Firearms (Scotland) Rules 1989, all applications for firearms certificates require to be verified by means of countersignature by a person who is not a member of the applicant's family, is resident in Great Britain, has known the applicant for at least two years and is a justice of the peace or someone of similar standing. Lord Cullen's report on the public inquiry into the shootings at Dunblane primary school, Cm 3386, records at paragraph 6.46 that Thomas Hamilton's applications in 1992 and 1995 were countersigned by a justice of the peace.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the consequences of the approaches made by Thomas Hamilton to the ombudsman. [3019]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* This is dealt with in chapter 4 of Lord Cullen's report, Cm 3386.

Housing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the role of low-impact and self-built accommodation in the provision of affordable housing; and if he will make a statement. [3374]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: There are a number of schemes in place designed to encourage the provision of appropriate affordable housing in Scotland. The role of low-impact accommodation within that provision has not yet been formally assessed. Scottish Homes is supporting self-build housing through a number of its existing grant mechanisms and will be evaluating the success of this approach in due course.

Planning Guidelines

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment his Department has made of the advantages of giving additional weight to environmental impact in determining planning restrictions on agricultural holdings. [3365]

Mr. Kynoch: The Scottish Office has not made any specific assessment of the weight which should be given to environmental impact in relation to agricultural holdings. Each planning application has to be considered on its own merits, taking account of the provisions of the development plan and all other material considerations, including environmental impact. It is for the planning authority determining the application to decide what weight to give to particular considerations. However, the Government recognise the importance of protecting the environmental qualities of rural areas and this principle is acknowledged in current planning guidance.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to review planning guidance on agricultural and other dwellings in the countryside in order to give greater weight to environmental and social sustainability; and if he will make a statement. [3379]

Mr. Kynoch: The Scottish Office is presently drafting a new national planning policy guideline on rural development which should be issued for consultation early in 1997. Publication of this NPPG will fulfil a commitment in the White Paper "Rural Scotland: People, Prosperity and Partnership", Cm 3041, that the Government would produce guidance intended to encourage positive and sustainable provision for employment and community purposes using the development plan and development control systems.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy in relation to his Department's non-departmental public bodies *(a)* consulting with hon. Members on developments in their constituencies and *(b)* inviting hon. Members to events within their constituencies; what advice or guidance he (i) has given and (ii) proposes to issue on these matters; and if he will make a statement. [3034]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have given no specific advice to non-departmental public bodies on these issues. I would, however, expect them to observe the normal courtesies in relation to matters in hon. Members' constituencies.

Crofting Trusts Advisory Service

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a breakdown of the number of specific inquiries made to the crofting trusts advisory service since its inception; and if he will make a statement. [3173]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The crofting trusts advisory service has had nine inquiries from crofting communities plus four from individual crofters and 26 from other parties.

There have also been eight meetings with individual crofting communities, an open meeting in Skye and another in the Uists. In addition, CTAS has assisted one community to meet the cost of a study into the viability of community ownership and helped another with the legal costs of establishing a crofting trust.

Forestry Commission (Woodland Sales)

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list all Forestry Commission woodlands currently for sale, and indicate for each

(a) into which English or Welsh county or Scottish region it falls, *(b)* the number of hectares covered and *(c)* if an access agreement has been made with the local authority guaranteeing continuing public access; [475]

(2) how many Forestry Commission woodlands have been sold since October 1991; how many of these were sold without public access protected; how many hectares of Forestry Commission woodland have been sold from October 1991 to the latest available date; and how many hectares have been sold with public access protected; [476]

(3) how many Forestry Commission woodlands have been sold in each month of 1996 to date, indicating for each month *(a)* the number sold with access to the public protected and *(b)* the number sold with access to the public not protected; [477]

(4) if he will list all the Forestry Commission woodlands for which the level of existing access has been assessed under the guidelines on continued public access to Forestry Commission woodlands after sale, giving for each *(a)* the English or Welsh county or Scottish region into which it falls, *(b)* the number of hectares covered by the woodland *(c)* the Forestry Commission's formal judgement regarding the importance of access at that woodland, *(d)* what consultations were carried out by Forestry Commission staff in making their judgment, *(e)* whether the woodland has been sold, or is currently for sale, or has been withdrawn from sale and *(f)* whether a public access agreement is currently in force. [478]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 28 October 1996]:* The subjects of the questions relate to matters undertaken by Forest Enterprise. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. Gordon Cowie, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Gordon M. Cowie to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 12 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Scotland has asked me to reply to your four Questions about the sale of Forestry Commission woodlands.

1. At Annex A, I enclose a list of all Forestry Commission Woodlands currently for sale, either on the Open Market or by Negotiation.

2. The Forestry Commission sold 766 Woodlands covering 39,938 hectares in the period 1 October 1991 to 31 December 1995. Of them 48, 2,421 hectares, have Public Access protected either through a public access agreement or under the sponsorship arrangements.

3. I enclose at Annex B, details of the number of Forestry Commission woodlands sold in each month this year.

4. I regret that I am unable to answer your final question asking for details of the assessment of the level of public use in each individual case. We have assessed well over 1,500 woodlands since these procedures were introduced, and the details of the assessments are only stored on the individual files which are held in local offices throughout Britain; we have not summarised the assessments in any way. I am sure that you will appreciate, therefore, that it would be a very expensive and time-consuming task to provide the information needed to answer your question.

Annex A: List of Forestry Commission woodland areas currently for sale

Name of property	*Area (ha)*
ENGLAND	
Avon	
Greyfield Wood	38.0

Annex A: List of Forestry Commission woodland areas currently for sale

Name of property	*Area (ha)*
Buckinghamshire	
Back Lane Wood	7.5
Beech and Howlets Wood	7.0
Greens	1.5
Cornwall	
Port Eliot Kilquite and Waste	6.6
Wheal Par	5.0
Cumbria	
Denton Fell	627.0
Devon	
Deershill	11.0
Knowle Wood	8.0
Durham	
Stanley Cotts Wood[1]	31.0
East Yorkshire	
Black Plantation	14.0
Greenwickdale	43.5
Seaton Old	16.5
Hampshire	
Basset Green (land at)	1.9
Hereford and Worcestershire	
Newhouse Wood[2]	227.5
Hertfordshire	
Dawley Wood	19.0
Hoo Wood	18.0
Priest Wood	28.0
The Square and Cooks Coppice	5.5
Kent	
Challock Benacre Wood	25.0
Norfolk	
West Rudham	78.0
North Yorkshire	
Cold Kirby Woods [1]	116.0
Dunnington Woods	80.0
Glaisdale Blocks	141.5
Hayton Wood[2]	56.0
Hazel Wood[2]	51.0
Nottinghamshire	
Roe Wood	47.0
Shropshire	
Caldy Bank	8.9
Curnia Bank	13.3
Llan Llwyd	3.8
Somerset	
East Cranmore Wood[2]	28.0
Higher Bitcombe	30.0
Pink Wood	33.0
The Bushes	15.0
Wanstrow[2]	45.0
South Yorkshire	
Green Springs Wood[2]	12.0
Old Park Wood[2]	41.0
Wiltshire	
Stanton Park	58.0

Annex A: List of Forestry Commission woodland areas currently for sale

Name of property	*Area (ha)*
WALES	
Aberconwy and Colwyn	
Blackthorn Covert	21.5
Cefn Mawr	81.7
Cerrigellgwm	20.0
Coed Bryn Kenrick	8.0
Coed Melin Y Moch	12.0
Coed Plas Isaf	6.0
Coed Salisbury	4.0
Gelli Wood	6.0
Gwrych Castle Woodlands	49.0
Caerphilly	
Bedwas	2.0
Craig Y Parc	16.0
Craig Yr Arail	58.0
Hafodrisclawdd	24.0
Carmarthenshire	
Allt Cil Y Llyn Fawr	2.5
Allt Maes Yr Awdy	6.0
Allt Pant Glas	9.0
Allt Parc Y Dilfa	14.0
Allt Wig Wen	8.2
Allt Y Fron-Abermarlais 2	5.6
Cathilas	51.4
Cefn Wig	19.0
Coed Caeau Gwynion-Abermarlais	4.8
Coed Glyn Aeron[2]	57.0
Cwmllannarch	32.0
Falcondale Big Wood	10.0
Farthings Hook	18.0
Gallt Fydr	33.0
Henfeddau Ty Hen and Long Wood	23.0
Maesgwyn	20.0
Martletwy Wood	18.0
Nant Ffrwd	26.0
Penhill Wood	4.0
Pentre Mawr Trebwi	10.0
Rosehill Wood-Abermarlais 3	3.9
Tannerdy and Allt Y Fan Glansefi	22.0
Ty Rhyg[2]	120.0
Gwynedd	
Amnodd Wood	87.5
Bodfuan	101.0
Bronaber	10.0
Bryn Hendre	10.0
Brynffynnon	7.0
Brynffynnon Coed	6.0
Caeau Bodfel	28.0
Cefn Glas	12.0
Coed Cefn	16.0
Coed Mynydd Mawr	24.0
Cwm Prysor	56.0
Cymerau[2]	87.5
Dolymoch[2]	22.0
Flat Covert	15.0
Frochas 1	7.5
Frochas 2	3.1
Frochas 3	5.4
Frochas 4	7.4
Gelli Dywyll[2]	25.0
Graianog[2]	19.0
Hafotty Covert	35.0
Pengwern	15.0
Rhiwbach and Tyddyn Bach[2]	106.0
Tan Y Clawdd[2]	13.0
Ynys Creua	67.0
Ynys Galed	22.0
Ty Coch North	7.1
Neath and Port Talbot	
Graig Ynysgollen	10.0
Nant Y Stalwyn[2]	44.0
Powys	
Cefn Derw Cil Owen	10.0
Cefn Perfa Wood	3.4
Cil Llwyn[2]	15.0
Freezeland[2]	10.5
Geufron	10.1
Gloddfa Nursery	5.2
Gorther Rough	8.0
Husky Hall	1.8
Llys Coppice and Penllys	16.0
Lower Ceulannau	3.8
Lower Wig	2.2
Penycarreg East	3.0
Penycarreg West	11.0
Penycastle Wood	10.4
Pool Plantation and Kerry Hill	12.7
Rock Wood and Fronfraith Wood[2]	30.5
The Smatcher[2]	35.5
Tyn Y Cwm	3.5
Y Wern[2]	453.0
SCOTLAND	
Dumfries and Galloway	
Cairnhead[1]	1,361.0
Euchenhead[1]	689.0
Glaisters	383.0
Glenluce[1]	40.0
Polskeoch[1]	830.0
Shinnelhead[1]	843.0
Grampian	
Auchinroath Plantation	62.0
Balmakewan (3222M)	0.6
Haremoss	21.0
Highland	
Ardbrecknish[2]	626.0
Kirkton	92.0
Orbost Plantation	575.0
Waternish	1,159.0
Strathclyde	
Ardlamont[1]	749.0
Knockbain	145.0
Little Clyde	650.0
Scoor Wood, Lot 5	360.0
Tayside	
Easter Muirhead	34.4
Newbigging and Braedownie	413.0
Warroch	68.0

[1]CPA agreement being negotiated.[2] CPA agreement completed.

Annex B: Forestry Commission areas sold in 1996

	Without CPA agreement	*With CPA agreement*	*Public access protected*[1]
January	18	3	—
February	9	3	—
March	16	7	—
April	10	1	1
May	13	1	—
June	10	3	—
July	13	1	—
August	6	1	—
September	6	3	—
October	6	2	—

[1] Sold under Forestry Commission Sponsorship arrangements.

BSE

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the total expenditure to date on the BSE eradication and compensation schemes; and if he will make a statement. [2163]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 6 November 1996]:* The total expenditure to date is £700 million. Most of this expenditure has been on the over-30-month slaughter scheme, the calf processing scheme, the additional EU compensation package—beef special premium scheme and suckler cow premium scheme top-up, beef marketing payment scheme—the beef stocks transfer scheme, the animal feed recall scheme, aid to renderers, emergency aid to the slaughtering sector.

HEALTH

Dementia

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the basic training nurses receive in respect of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia; [3272]

(2) what steps he has taken to improve the training of health and social care professionals in respect of people with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. [3271]

Mr. Burns: Such training is primarily the responsibility of the relevant professional bodies and of the organisations which employ health and social care professionals.

Students who undertake pre-registration nursing programmes in adult or mental health nursing gain an understanding of the various forms of dementia and the care and treatment of people with dementia, including Alzheimer's disease.

The Department has contributed funding towards the provision of training material on dementia for mental health professionals. We commissioned Manchester university to produce training literature in mental health, including specific guidance on older people with mental health problems. We helped the Alzheimer's Disease Society with the production costs of its recent training pack for general practitioner trainers, "Dementia in the Community: management strategies for general practice". The Department also contributed funding to a recent feasibility study led by the British Medical Association into an educational video for GPs on dementia.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people suffering from Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia *(a)* at present and *(b)* for the year 2006. [3274]

Mr. Burns: We estimate that there were around 600,000 people with a diagnosis of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, in 1994, which will rise to 652,000 in 2006.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the current state of research *(a)* funded and *(b)* evaluated by his Department into Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. [3275]

Mr. Burns: The Department runs two separate research programmes: the policy research programme and the national health service research and development programme. The latest available information on research being carried out under the policy research programme is contained in "The Centrally Commissioned Research Programme: Commissions in 1994–95", copies of which are in the Library.

The NHS research and development programme consists of a number of national programmes and regional research activity. The mental health programme includes a project examining the development of screening tests for dementia and depression in ethnic elders; it also includes a project which is examining dementia information in order to develop a model to establish the number of people in a given population needing specific dementia services. Information is not available centrally on all the regional research projects being undertaken. The projects on which information is available centrally include a study of the patterns and consequences of semantic memory impairment in Alzheimer's disease; a community–based control study of dementias; a study of neuronal structure in aging and Alzheimer's based dementia; and cognitive decline, dementia and aging in people with Down's syndrome: a study of the risk factors and care needs.

NHS Information Management Group

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent by the national health service information management group in each of the last three years on consultancy fees; to which organisations it has been paid; and for what purposes. [3288]

Mr. Horam: The spend on consultancy fees from vote 2 of Department of Health budgets by the information management group in the last three years is as follows:

1996–97: £3 million (estimated)

1995–96: £4.8 million

1994–95: £4.1 million

These fees were paid for consultancy in support of the information management and technology strategy across a number of projects. Many consultancy firms and individuals were employed during this time and a breakdown by individual firms and projects can be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Tay-Sachs Disease

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding his Department has made available for research into Tay-Sachs disease. [3061]

Mr. Horam: Information on research commissioned by the Department of Health is contained in "The Centrally Commissioned Research Programme" and "The Centrally Commissioned Research Programme: Commissions in 1994–95", copies of which are available in the Library.

Prodigy Pilot Study

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the extension of the Prodigy pilot study on *(a)* inward investment by non-United Kingdom-owned pharmaceutical companies, *(b)* research and development expenditure by the United Kingdom pharmaceutical industry, *(c)* export performance by the United Kingdom pharmaceutical industry and (d) the introduction in the United Kingdom of new medicines; and if he will make a statement. [3294]

Mr. Malone: None.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what consultations there were with patient groups over the drafting of the patient advice leaflets provided in the Prodigy pilot study; and if he will make a statement; [3290]

(2) when the steering group of the NHS executive's patient partnership initiative was consulted about the recommendations on prescribing in the Prodigy pilot study and the contents of the patient advice leaflets; and if he will make a statement; [3295]

(3) what steps he has taken to ensure that the prescribing recommendations in the Prodigy pilot study *(a)* are up-to-date, *(b)* are fully evaluated and *(c)* have as their primary purpose the greatest possible improvement in patient health; and if he will make a statement. [3432]

Mr. Malone: Prodigy is a research project to assess the value and acceptability of decision support for general practitioners. The prescribing recommendations and patient advice leaflets for the pilot were derived from respected sources including the British National Formulary and validated by a multi-professional group.

Formal consultation at this stage would not have been appropriate, although we are in discussion with a number of interested parties about possible enhancements for the next phase of the project. The Department recently held a seminar, chaired by the chief medical officer, to look at which processes could be used to develop the therapeutic guidance and advice leaflets if it is ultimately decided to implement a national decision support system. A large measure of agreement was reached on the basis of a process which would be transparent, open and professional and reflect the latest evidence-based information. The seminar was attended by professional interests, patient groups, NHS management and the pharmaceutical industry.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total cost to date of the Prodigy pilot study; how this cost is broken down; what estimates he has made of the cost to his Department of phases 2 and 3 of the study; and what estimate he has made of the cost of extending the project to all United Kingdom general practices. [3293]

Mr. Malone: The total cost to date is £1,900,000. Costs for phase 2 are currently being negotiated. Any decision on future roll-out will be taken in light of the research findings which will also indicate the likely costs.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact on patient care and the results of treatment of implementing the recommendations of the Prodigy pilot study about prescribing; and what further steps he is taking to assess the impact. [3287]

Mr. Malone: Prodigy is a three-year research and development project the results of which will not be known until late 1997.

Health Strategy Committee

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Health Strategy has met in the last three years; on how many of these occasions "The Health of the Nation" targets have been discussed; when the last meeting took place; and when the next meeting is scheduled. [3298]

Mr. Horam: The Ministerial Sub-Committee on Health Strategy, EDH(H), has met seven times in the last three years. EDH(H)'s terms of reference are: to oversee the development, implementation and monitoring of the Government's health strategy, to co-ordinate the Government's policies on United Kingdom-wide issues affecting health, and report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Home and Social Affairs. "The Health of the Nation" targets were discussed on all occasions. The last meeting was on 18 June 1996. The next meeting has not yet been scheduled.

Nursing and Residential Homes

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing and residential homes there are in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales. [3273]

Mr. Burns: At 31 March 1995, there were 16,320 local authority and registered residential care homes with four or more places, 5,540 registered residential homes with less than four places and 5,330 registered private nursing care homes in England. The numbers of homes in Scotland and in Wales are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales respectively.

Steroids

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it mandatory for warnings on the hazards associated with steroid treatment to be issued with each steroid prescription. [3057]

Mr. Malone: This is already mandatory.

Duplicate NHS Numbers

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many duplicate NHS numbers have been issued to date; if further duplicate numbers are being issued; what progress has been made towards correcting the duplicate

number problem and renumbering persons issued with duplicate numbers; what has been the total cost to date of the duplicate number problem; and what estimate he has made of the final cost. [3297]

Mr. Horam: National health service numbers issued by registrars of births and deaths are provisional until confirmed through health authorities on a patient's medical card.

Between 4 December 1995, when the new NHS number was introduced, and 18 October 1996, the latest date for which figures are available, 4,793 new NHS numbers were assigned by RBDs which were re-issued at a subsequent birth registration. This is approximately 1 per cent. of all registrations. Whenever an NHS number is erroneously re-issued, at least two registrations are affected; occasionally numbers have been re-issued more than once, thereby affecting three or more registrations.

Duplicate numbers continued to be issued at birth registration, but at a reduced rate. In the reply I gave the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) on 8 July, *Official Report*, column *14*, it was confirmed that a study into the reasons for the issuing of duplicate numbers would be carried out. That study is now complete, and a copy of its final report is due to be placed in the Library shortly.

If a duplicate number is issued at birth registration, this is detected at the NHS central register. In this circumstance, the duplicated number is not used for either baby; both are issued with unique replacement NHS numbers. This also applies if more than two babies have been issued with the same number.

The cost to date to the new NHS number programme of addressing the issue of non-unique NHS numbers is £40,000; the expected final cost is £130,000.

Public Health Laboratory Service

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are his Department's proposals for reductions in the budget of the public health laboratory service; and which services will be affected. [3408]

Mr. Horam: The public health laboratory service received funding of £55.2 million directly from the Department of Health for 1996–97. As with all Government bodies, the public health laboratory service is expected to achieve efficiency savings each year, and the level of these savings is reviewed annually. Funding for 1997–98 will be notified shortly after the Chancellor's "Autumn Statement".

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has for the future of the public health laboratory service; and if he will make a statement. [3419]

Mr. Horam: I announced on 19 July that a prior options review of the public health laboratory service had recently begun, that interested parties would be invited to comment and that the review would report to Ministers in December. The period of consultation drew to a close last week, and comments from a wide range of organisations, including professional bodies, are now being analysed.

Child Labour

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the procedures are for liaison between his Department and other Government Departments with responsibilities in the area of child labour. [3683]

Mr. Burns: The Department maintains close links with other Government Departments as part of its everyday business.

Correspondence

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the replies which he received to his letter of 7 November to all Labour Members. [3688]

Mr. Dorrell: The letters referred to were sent out in my capacity as a Member of Parliament and not as the Secretary of State for Health.

Personal Social Services

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on the proposed new initiative to encourage better use of research evidence in the purchasing and provision of personal social services. [3971]

Mr. Burns: The aim of this new initiative is to help local authorities improve the cost-effectiveness of social services through better use of research evidence. I am very pleased to say that contractual terms have now been agreed, and contracts are likely to be signed very shortly with Exeter university and a consortium of 12 directors of social services in the south-west of England for this jointly funded initiative, beginning in January 1997.

Dental Services

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his oral answer of 5 November, *Official Report*, column 1024, what was the number of dentists in England providing NHS treatment on 30 June 1995. [4049]

Mr. Malone: I regret that my reply, which quoted 15,927 dentists in the general dental services in England at 30 June 1995, was incorrect. That is the figure for June 1996. The correct number for June 1995 is 15,616.

Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure health professionals are informed of the methods of recognising and treating attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder now employed in the United States of America; and if he will make a statement. [2504]

Mr. Burns: It is the responsibility of professional and academic bodies to assess the evidence for the best approaches in the recognition and treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. This evidence is available in literature from around the world, including the United States, and is widely available in professional journals within this country.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on use of advice issued to child psychiatrists in respect of treatment of

hyperactivity and of the flow chart attached; what plans he has to review the efficacy of such advice; and if he will make a statement. [2505]

Mr. Burns: None. It is for the relevant professional and academic bodies to review and evaluate evidence for the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and to disseminate such information through training and through publications in professional journals and texts.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to examine the practice among medical practitioners of giving up the use of Ritalin among children suffering from attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder after 12 months' use; and if he will make a statement. [2506]

Mr. Burns: The use of Ritalin to treat children suffering from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is a matter for professional and clinical judgment and we have no plans to examine it.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his Department has made of the number of children identified as suffering from hyperkinetic disorder; and what percentage this is of his estimate of the total number of persons suffering from this disorder. [2507]

Mr. Burns: Information on the number of children identified as suffering from hyperkinetic disorder is not collected centrally.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's latest assessment of the effectiveness of dopamine-releasing agents with special reference to Ritalin, in the treatment of attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder; what is his assessment of the use currently made of such treatment in the United States of America; and if he will make a statement. [2508]

Mr. Burns: We recognise that the more severe forms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder can be treated with Ritalin or other appropriate medication. Such medication should be part of a comprehensive treatment programme which may also include psychological, educational and social measures designed to stabilise children with the condition. There is a widespread view among clinicians in this country that a higher percentage of such children are treated with medication in the United States than is desirable or necessary.

Coronary Care

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* medical receiving room and *(b)* minor accident treatment service units capable of dealing with coronary care. [3515]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what regulations his Department proposes to repeal by the end of 1996; if he proposes to conduct a compliance cost assessment on each regulation repealed; and what is the estimated cost of undertaking a compliance cost assessment to determine the advantages and disadvantages of such a repeal. [3780]

Mr. Horam: The Department currently proposes to repeal or amend the following regulations by the end of 1996:

The Imported Food Regulations 1984;

The Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations 1995;

The Nursing Homes and Mental Nursing Homes Regulations 1984.

Since the effect in each case will be to reduce, rather than increase, compliance costs, a compliance cost assessment is not required. Departments do, however, seek to estimate approximate savings wherever possible and, where there is a potential impact on industry, a CCA is completed in all cases. The cost of undertaking a CCA varies from case to case but it is generally modest. Because part of the cost falls on the businesses consulted, a full CCA would be inappropriate for measures designed to reduce business burdens.

Silicon Bridge Research

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 1 November, *Official Report*, column *293*, if he will place in the Library a copy of the Silicon Bridge Research report. [3669]

Mr. Horam: The Silicon Bridge Research report will be published shortly. Copies will be placed in the Library.

CAMS Ltd.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 1 November, *Official Report*, column *293*, which parts of the CAMS contract with his Department have recently been terminated; and if he will make a statement. [3670]

Mr. Horam: No parts of the CAMS contracts with the Department of Health for the licensing and support of Read codes in the national health service, and for their licensing and support internationally, have been terminated recently.

Neonatal and Perinatal Mortality

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* neonatal and *(b)* perinatal mortality rates for the last four years by (i) trust, (ii) health authority and (iii) region. [2668]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Alan Keen, dated 12 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question requesting neonatal and perinatal rates for the last four years by *(a)* trust, *(b)* health authority and *(c)* region.

The information by health authority and region for the last four years is available in OPCS/ONS Monitors DH3 93/1 (1992), DH3 94/2 (1993) DH3 95/2 (1994) AND DH3 96/1 (1995), copies of which are available in the House of the Commons Library.

Neonatal and perinatal mortality statistics by hospital trust is not routinely available and can only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

TREASURY

Taxpayers

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many taxpayers paid tax at the lower and basic rates between 1992–93 and 1996–97. [3972]

Mr. Jack: The figures are set out in the table. Over a quarter of taxpayers now have a marginal rate of only 20 per cent.

Millions

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*[1]1995–96*	*[1]1996–97*
Lower rate[2]	4.24	5.39	5.18	5.6	7.1
Basic rate	19.40	17.87	18.17	18.0	16.5

Notes:
[1]Provisional.
[2]From 1993–94 onwards a number of taxpayers with taxable income in excess of the lower rate limit pay tax only at the lower rate. This is because their dividend and (from 1996–97) their savings income takes their taxable income above the lower rate limit and such income is chargeable to tax at the lower and not the basic rate. The numbers in this category for the four years between 1993–94 and 1996–97 are 0.22/0.24/0.3/0.8 millions respectively.

EU Budget Council

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the EU Budget Council meeting of 25 July. [3973]

Mr. Oppenheim: Sir Stephen Wall, the United Kingdom permanent representative to the European Union, represented the United Kingdom at the Budget Council on 25 July. The Council considered the Commission's preliminary draft budget for 1997. The draft budget established by the Council totalled 88.5 billion ecu—£69.2 billion—in commitment appropriations and 81.6 billion ecu—£63.9 billion—in payment appropriations. The draft budget would require own resources totalling 1.15 per cent. of Community gross national product, compared with the own resources ceiling of 1.24 per cent. of Community GNP. The draft budget is within the financial perspective ceilings.

For the first time ever, the Council set its draft budget at the same level overall as in the preceding year—that is, zero growth.

In establishing its draft budget the Council took account of the economic and financial context for 1997 to define real priorities within the resources available and to ensure that this was reflected in a realistic budget.

The Council established its 1997 draft budget by a qualified majority with Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Austria voting against. No other formal votes were taken.

The summary table below compares the outcome of the Budget Council to the proposals in the Commission's amended preliminary draft budget by reference to the financial perspective ceilings.

(Further information is contained in the explanatory memorandum (9372/96) on the draft budget, which was deposited in the UK Parliament on 11 October.)

The European Parliament considered the draft budget for 1997 at its plenary in October. The Parliament's amendments and modifications will be considered at the second Budget Council on 19 November. The European Parliament's Second Reading is likely to be in mid-December.

	Financial perspective ceilings[1]		*Preliminary draft budget*		*Budget council draft budget*	
	mecu	*£ million*	*mecu*	*£ million*	*mecu*	*£ million*
Commitment appropriations						
1. EAGGF guarantee	41,805	32,698	41,805	32,698	40,805	31,916
2. Structural operations	31,477	24,620	31,477	24,620	31,477	24,620
3. Internal policies	5,603	4,382	5,523	4,320	5,255	4,110
4. External action	5,622	4,397	5,528	4,324	5,310	4,153
5. Administration	4,352	3,404	4,369	3,418	4,245	3,320
6. Reserves	1,158	906	1,158	906	1,158	906
7. Compensation	212	166	212	166	212	166
Total: Commitment appropriations	90,229	70,574	90,072	70,452	88,461	69,191
Total: Payment appropriations	85,807	67,115	84,521	66,110	81,646	63,861

[1]Throughout this reply the rate of £1=1.2785 ecu has been used (the rate notified in the *Official Journal* as prevailing on the last working day of the last month (31 October)).

Inheritance Tax Exemption

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the value of inheritance tax for which conditional exemption has been granted to allow public access to land for each year since 1975. [1647]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 5 November 1996]:* The annual average cost, in the years 1983–84 to 1995–96, of conditional exemption from inheritance tax—or its predecessor, capital transfer tax—for land and buildings is estimated at between £5 million and £10 million. Figures for earlier years are not available.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many sites in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales have been granted conditional exemption from inheritance tax on the basis of reasonable public access being granted; and what is the area of each site. [1648]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 5 November 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 29 March, *Official Report*, column 777.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library copies of any statements made since 1979 setting out Government policies and practices which outline the granting and publicising of conditional exemption from inheritance tax in return for reasonable public access. [1649]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 5 November 1996]:* The Government's various statements to the House on the topics in question are already a matter of public record. I am arranging for copies of the Inland Revenue's publications about conditional exemption, booklets IR 67, "Capital taxation and the national heritage", and IR 88, "Capital tax relief for national heritage property—how to make a claim", to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many locations granted conditional exemption from inheritance tax on condition of allowing reasonable public access have been included in the annual register of countryside stewardship scheme access sites in each of the past five years; [1625]

(2) how many sites in the register of countryside stewardship scheme access sites received funding through the granting of conditional exemption of inheritance tax on the basis of reasonable public access for each of the last five years. [1628]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 5 November 1996]:* In return for conditional exemption from inheritance tax, the owners have to give undertakings which cover not only provision of reasonable public access but the maintenance and preservation of the land. There have been 11 areas of conditionally exempt scenic land included with the countryside stewardship scheme access sites since 1993, when such land first appeared in the records of the scheme.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is his policy in respect of British membership of the Monetary Committee, appointed under article 109c of the treaty on European Union, if the United Kingdom declared against proceeding to the third stage of economic and monetary union; and to what extent the British members' powers and voting rights would be modified; [49]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact on United Kingdom membership of the Economic and Financial Committee appointed under article 109c of the treaty on European Union of a United Kingdom declaration against proceeding to the third stage of economic and monetary union. [9]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Article 109c(1) of the EC treaty provides for the establishment of a Monetary Committee with advisory status. Its tasks include keeping under review the monetary and financial situation within the Community and preparing the work of the Council of Economic and Finance Ministers, ECOFIN, including the formulation of opinions on excessive deficits under article 104c(4) of the treaty. The United Kingdom would still participate in the Committee if the Government were to decide that the United Kingdom should not participate in the third stage of economic and monetary union. The powers and voting rights of its two members on the Committee would not be modified.

Article 109c(2) of the treaty provides for the Monetary Committee to be dissolved at the start of the third stage of EMU. It also provides for all member states, the European Commission and the European central bank to each appoint "no more than two members" to the Economic and Financial Committee. The EFC will be an advisory body. Its tasks will include keeping under review the monetary and financial situation within the Community and preparing the work of ECOFIN, including the formulation of opinions on excessive deficits under article 104c(4) of the treaty, and other tasks assigned to it by ECOFIN.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent the United Kingdom's right to participate in the discussions, and vote on which countries fulfil the necessary conditions for the adoption of a single currency, as described in article 109j of the treaty on European Union, is *(a)* withdrawn and *(b)* modified if the United Kingdom decides not to join the third stage of economic and monetary union. [10]

Mrs. Knight: All member states will be able to participate and vote in the decisions under article 109j of the EC treaty on which member states fulfil the necessary conditions to adopt the single currency at the start of the third stage of economic and monetary union.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the United Kingdom is obliged to subscribe to the capital of the European central bank when it comes into being if the United Kingdom does not join the third stage of economic monetary union; and what estimate he has made of the cost of subscription. [50]

Mrs. Knight: Article 28 of the statute of the European system of central banks contained in protocol No. 3 to the EC treaty provides for the European central bank to have capital of 5,000 million ecu when it is established. The subscription to the capital by the national central banks of countries participating in the single currency will be on the basis of the key in article 29 of the statute. The ECB will, in addition to its tasks relating to the single currency and participating member states, also take over certain remaining tasks of the European Monetary Institute relating to countries not participating in the single currency. Article 48 of the statute of the ESCB provides for the possibility of non-participating member states' national central banks contributing a "minimal" share of the capital towards the operational costs of the ECB in certain circumstances. This would require a decision of the general council of the ECB on which the national central banks of non-participating member states will be represented.

Single European Currency

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost to the United Kingdom of converting to a single European currency; and if he will list cost estimates for each major sector of commerce, industry, Government and the general public. [11]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Government have not made any such estimates. The Government will take into account the potential costs of introducing the single currency when the facts are known and when they make their decisions on whether the United Kingdom should seek to participate in the single currency, at the appropriate time.

Self-employment Statistics

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the population in *(a)* the London borough of Lewisham, *(b)* the SOLOTEC area, *(c)* the wider central area, *(d)* Greater London and *(e)* the rest of southern England, were self-employed, using the labour force survey and mid-year population estimates in each of the past three years. [2300]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mrs. Bridget Prentice, dated 12 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the proportion of the population who are self-employed in the South East.

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) covers the population in private households plus persons in NHS accommodation and students in halls of residence. The mid-year population estimates additionally cover the rest of the non-household population. It is therefore more appropriate to calculate the proportions who are self employed using LFS estimates. This information can be accessed through the NOMIS database by the House of Common Library.

Mid-year population estimates taken from the Census of Population are published in *Monitor—Population and Health*. A copy of this publication is also available from the House of Commons Library.

Unemployment

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the proportion of male and female unemployed for *(a)* one year and *(b)* two years among the total unemployed for the latest period, and for the same period in 1995, 1994 and 1993 in *(a)* the London borough of Lewisham, *(b)* the SOLOTEC area, *(c)* the wider centre area, *(d)* Greater London and *(e)* the rest of the south-east; [2304]

(2) if he will list the proportion of 17 to 19-year-olds unemployed for the latest period, and the same period in 1995, 1994 and 1993 in *(a)* the London borough of Lewisham, *(b)* the SOLOTEC area, *(c)* the wider central area, *(d)* Greater London and *(e)* the rest of southern England. [2303]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mrs. Bridget Prentice, dated 12 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent questions on the proportion of the population who are unemployed in the South East.

Published information on the numbers of people unemployed by duration and sex for the areas requested is restricted to claimant unemployment. The corresponding analyses from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), on unemployment on the internationally standard ILO basis are not available for TEC areas such as SOLOTEC which do not match local authority boundaries. In addition figures are not available for Lewisham because they are unreliable at this level of geographical disagregation.

The LFS provides ILO unemployment rates covering all the years requested for 16–19 year olds for Greater London and ROSE but not for the other areas listed. Claimant unemployment rates at this level of disagregation are only available for travel-to-work areas and unitary authorities and are not calculated for different age groups.

The available data can be assessed through NOMIS and the LFS Database in the House of Commons Library.

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many people *(a)* in total and *(b)* in the age bands (i) 16 to 24 years, (ii) 25 to 34 years, (iii) 35 to 44 years, (iv) 45 to 54 years, (v) 55 to 64 years and (vi) 65 years and over, have experienced at least one spell of unemployment since 1992, in each parliamentary constituency in the United Kingdom, taking the new constituency boundaries, (1) as an absolute figure and (2) as a percentage of the number of people employed in the constituency using the 1993 figures in the absence of the 1995 figures in the relevant age band; [1907]

(2) what is the average length of time between claims for a claimant since 1992 *(a)* in total and *(b)* in the age bands (i) 16 to 24 years, (ii) 25 to 34 year, (iii) 35 to 44 years, (iv) 45 to 54 years, (v) 55 to 64 years and (vi) 65 years and over, in each parliamentary constituency in the United Kingdom; [1912]

(3) what is the average number of claimants, in each constituency of the United Kingdom, *(a)* in total and *(b)* in the age bands (i) 16 to 24 years, (ii) 25 to 34 years, (iii) 35 to 44 years, (iv) 45 to 54 years, (v) 55 to 64 years and (vi) 65 years and over, whose duration of unemployment became more than 12 months in each month since January 1992; [1892]

(4) how many people *(a)* in total and *(b)* in the age bands (i) 16 to 24 years, (ii) 25 to 34 years, (iii) 35 to 44 years, (iv) 45 to 54 years, (v) 55 to 64 years and (vi) 65 years and over, have experienced (1) two, (2) three, (3) four and (4) five spells of unemployment, since 1992, in each parliamentary constituency in the United Kingdom, taking the new parliamentary constituency boundaries, *(x)* as an absolute figure and *(y)* as a percentage of the number of people employed in the constituency using the 1993 figures in the absence of the 1995 figures; [1914]

(5) what is the average number of claims made by a claimant since 1992 *(a)* in total and *(b)* the age bands (i) 16 to 24 years, (ii) 25 to 34 years, (iii) 35 to 44 years, (iv) 45 to 54 years, (v) 55 to 64 years and (vi) 65 years and over, in each parliamentary constituency in the United Kingdom; [1911]

(6) what is the number of claimants, in each parliamentary constituency in the United Kingdom, *(a)* in total and *(b)* in the age bands (i) 16 to 24 years, (ii) 25 to 34 years, (iii) 35 to 44 years, (iv) 45 to 54 years, (v) 55

to 64 years and (vi) 65 years and over, who have cumulatively claimed for 12 months or over, since 1992, in either one continuous claim or several separate claims (1) as an absolute figure, (2) as a percentage of the economically active work force in the relevant age band and (3) as a percentage of claimants in the relevant age band. [1889]

Mrs. Knight *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Judith Church, dated 12 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent questions (1889, 1892, 1907, 1911, 1912 and 1914) on unemployment spell details by parliamentary constituency.

The information requested is unavailable as the JUVOS unemployment cohort does not hold data by parliamentary constituency.

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many claimants, who had been claiming for 52 weeks or more in the United Kingdom, *(a)* in total and *(b)* overall and (1) in the age bands (i) 16 to 24 years, (ii) 25 to 34 years, (iii) 35 to 44 years, (iv) 45 to 54 years, (v) 55 to 64 years and (vi) 65 years and over, left the count for a job, in the year to June 1996 (1) in absolute terms and (2) as a percentage of all those who had been claiming for 52 weeks or more, in the year to June 1996. [1895]

Mrs. Knight *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Judith Church, dated 12 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how many claimants, who had been claiming unemployment-related benefits for 52 weeks or more in the United Kingdom left the count for a job.

The figures requested are shown in the tables below.

Number of leavers from claimant unemployment with a known destination, who had been claiming for 52 weeks or more, by destination of leaver and age

Thousands

Age band (years)	Destination of leaver: Found work	Other known destination	Total
16–24	66.0	55.2	121.2
25–34	84.1	76.6	160.7
35–44	48.3	50.6	98.8
45–54	37.4	47.0	84.5
55–64	12.0	47.6	59.5
65 and over	0.0	0.6	0.6
All ages	247.8	277.6	525.4

Leavers over the year to June 1996.

United Kingdom.

Percentage of leavers from claimant unemployment with a known destination, who had been claiming for 52 weeks or more, by destination of leaver and age

Percentage

Age band (years)	Destination of leaver: Found work	Other known destination	Total
16–24	54	46	100
25–34	52	48	100
35–44	49	51	100
45–54	44	56	100
55–64	20	80	100
65 and over	2	98	100
Total	47	53	100

Leavers over the year to June 1996.

United Kingdom.

You should note that for about a quarter of leavers we do not know their destination.

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average length of time between claims for a claimant since 1992 *(a)* in total and *(b)* in the age bands (i) 16 to 24 years, (ii) 25 to 34 years, (iii) 35 to 44 years, (iv) 45 to 54 years, (v) 55 to 64 years and (vi) 65 years and over in the United Kingdom. [1909]

Mrs. Knight *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Judith Church, dated 12 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the average length of time between claims for claimants since 1992, by age.

The available data are shown in the following table. Data are only available for Great Britain.

Average length of time between claims by age band, for claims since January 1992

Age band (years)	Average length of time between claims (days)
16–24	195
25–34	204
35–44	204
45–54	193
55–64	177
65 and over	0
All ages	198

Great Britain.

It is not possible to calculate proportions as a percentage of the economically active workforce because the corresponding number of people who have never been economically active over the period is not known—only point in time estimates of the latter are available.

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how may people in the United Kingdom *(a)* in total and *(b)* in the age bands (i) 16 to 24 years, (ii) 25 to 34 years, (iii) 35 to 44 years, (iv) 45 to 54 years, (v) 55 to 64 years and (vi) 65 years and over, leaving the claimant count in the year to June 1996, went to (1) jobs and (2) other destinations; and if he will give (3) as a percentage of those leaving the claimant count in each age band. [1890]

Mrs. Knight *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Judith Church, dated 12 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how many people in the United Kingdom leaving the claimant count in the year to June 1996, went to jobs and other destinations, by age.

The figures requested are shown in the tables below.

Number of leavers from claimant unemployment with a known destination, by destination and age

Thousands

	Destination of leaver		
Age band (years)	*Found work*	*Other known destination*	*Total*
16–24	526.1	191.0	717.1
25–34	465.3	186.5	651.8
35–44	283.0	117.3	400.3
45–54	241.4	111.3	352.7
55–64	80.3	95.9	176.2
65 and over	0.1	3.0	3.1
All ages	1596.2	705.0	2301.2

Leavers over the year to June 1996.
United Kingdom.

Percentage of leavers from claimant unemployment with a known destination, by destination of leaver and age

Percentage

	Destination of leaver		
Age band (years)	*Found work*	*Other known destination*	*Total*
16–24	73	27	100
25–34	71	29	100
35–44	71	29	100
45–54	68	32	100
55–64	46	54	100
65 and over	2	98	100
Total	69	31	100

Leavers over the year to June 1996.
United Kingdom.

You should note that for about a quarter of leavers we do not know their destination.

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many people in each parliamentary consistency in the United Kingdom *(a)* in total and *(b)* in the age bands (i) 16 to 24 years, (ii) 25 to 34 years, (iii) 35 to 44 years, (iv) 45 to 54 years, (v) 55 to 64 years and (vi) 65 years and over, leaving the claimant count in the year to June 1996, went to (1) jobs and (2) other destinations; and if he will give (2) as a percentage of those leaving the claimant count in each relevant age band; [1891]

(2) how many claimants, who had been claiming for 52 weeks or more, in each constituency in the United Kingdom *(a)* in total and *(b)* in the age bands (i) 16 to 24 years, (ii) 25 to 34 years, (iii) 35 to 44 years, (iv) 45 to 54 years, (v) 55 to 64 years and (vi) 65 years and over, left the count for a job in the year to June 1996 (1) in absolute terms (2) as a percentage of all those who had been claiming for 52 weeks or more in the year to June 1996. [1922]

Mrs. Knight *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Judith Church, dated 12 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent questions (1891 and 1914) on the destination of those leaving the claimant count in each parliamentary constituency.

The information on the destination of leavers from claimant unemployment is not available by parliamentary constituency.

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the number of claimants in the United Kingdom *(a)* in total and *(b)* in the age bands (i) 16 to 24 years, (ii) 25 to 34 years, (iii) 35 to 44 years, (iv) 45 to 54 years, (v) 55 to 64 years and (vi) 65 years and over who have cumulatively claimed for 12 months or over, since 1992, in either one continuous claim or several separate claims (1) as an absolute figure, (2) as a percentage of the economically active work force in the relevant age band and (3) as a percentage of claimants in the relevant age band. [1921]

Mrs. Knight *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Judith Church, dated 12 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the number of claimants in the United Kingdom who have cumulatively claimed for 12 months and over, since 1992, in either one continuous claim or several claims, by age.

The available data are shown in the following table. Data are only available for Great Britain.

Number of claimants within each age band, who have cumulatively claimed for 12 months or more, since January 1992

Thousands

Age band (years)	*Average length of time between claims (days)*
16–24	1,457.1
25–34	1,065.6
35–44	683.9
45–54	587.4
55–64	248.2
65 and over	0
All ages	4,042.3

Percentage of all claimants within each age band, who have cumulatively claimed for 12 months or more, since January 1992

Age band (years)	*Percentage of claimants*
16–24	38
25–34	41
35–44	40
45–54	40
55–64	34
65 and over	9
All ages	39

Great Britain.

It is not possible to calculate proportions as a percentage of the economically active work force because the corresponding number of people who have never been economically active over the period is not known—only point in time estimates of the latter are available.

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average number of claims made by a claimant since 1992 *(a)* in total and *(b)* in the age bands (i) 16 to 24 years, (ii) 25 to 34 years, (iii) 35 to 44 years, (iv) 45 to 54 years, (v) 55 to 64 years and (vi) 65 years and over in the United Kingdom. [1908]

Mrs. Knight *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Judith Church, dated 12 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the average number of claims by claimants since 1992, by age.

The available data are shown in the following table. Data are only available for Great Britain.

Average number of claims made by claimants since January 1992

Age band (years)	*Average number of claims*
16–24	2.2
25–34	2
35–44	1.92
45–54	1.8
55–64	1.45
65 and over	1.05
All ages	1.99

Great Britain.

Income Tax

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the *(a)* first-year and *(b)* full-year costs of raising the personal income tax allowance in 1997–98, in addition to price indexation, by (i) £50, (ii) £100, (iii) £150 and (iv) £200; and what is his estimate in each case of the number of individuals who as a consequence would no longer be liable to pay income tax. [3244]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* Available information is given in the table.

Increase in non aged and aged personal allowances indexation £	*Full year cost at 1997–98 income levels*[1] *£ million*	*First year cost at 1997–98 income levels £ million*	*Number of taxpayers taken out of income tax thousands*
50	320	240	120
100	630	470	230
150	940	710	350
200	1,250	940	450

[1] Based on the Summer Economic forecast and allowing for statutory indexation.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the cost in 1997–98 of reducing the present 24p income tax band to a 20p income tax band. [3243]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* The estimated full-year cost at 1997–98 income levels of reducing the basic rate of tax from 24 per cent. to 20 per cent. is £6.8 billion after allowing for statutory indexation of allowances and tax band widths. This is based on the summer economic forecast.

Mr. Alison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate the cost of revalorising fully the married couples allowance and the additional personal allowance to their 1990 introductory value, assuming that the allowances continue to be given at the rate of 15 per cent.; [2827]

(2) if he will estimate the cost of revalorising fully the married couples allowance and the additional personal allowance to their 1990 introductory value, assuming that the allowances were given at the taxpayers' marginal tax rate. [2825]

Mr. Jack: The full year cost of revalorising the 1990–91 married couples allowance and the linked allowances, which include the additional personal allowance and the widows bereavement allowance, to 1996–97 levels is given in the table.

	Cost in full year at 1996–97 income levels £ billion
Allowances given at 15 per cent.	0.5
Allowances given at marginal rates	3.0

Mr. Alison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost of allowing a married person to transfer an unused personal allowance to their spouse, on the assumption that the couple would not also be able to claim the married couples allowance. [2824]

Mr. Jack: The estimated full-year cost of allowing personal allowances to be transferred between spouses would be about £0.5 billion at 1996–97 income levels. This assumes that the married couples allowance would be abolished, but the widows bereavement allowance and the additional personal allowance would be retained. It does not take into account any behavioural change which would result from such a measure.

Overseas Investment Services

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will instruct the Inland Revenue to review the liability of Overseas Investment Services registered in the Turks and Caicos to pay tax in the United Kingdom in respect of its management from the United Kingdom; [2650]

(2) if he will investigate the financial regularity of the circumstances in which Firthpalm Ltd. transferred ownership of land at Mayals, Swansea in 1987–88 to Overseas Investment Services; [2652]

(3) if he will instruct the Inland Revenue to examine the terms in respect of liability for tax on which in 1987–88 Firthpalm Ltd. sold land at Mayals, Swansea, to Overseas Investment Services in Grand Turks and Caicos. [2651]

Mr. Jack: The tax affairs of particular companies are confidential between the Inland Revenue and the companies concerned. Treasury Ministers do not instruct the Inland Revenue to investigate a company's tax affairs or otherwise intervene in such matters.

VAT Reclaims

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact of the Waelbroeck opinion on the Government's policy to place a three-year limit on VAT reclaims. [3300]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* Customs and Excise has received a copy of this opinion and has had a meeting with the firm which commissioned it. It is being considered along with other representations received on the three-year cap.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in the value of the pound against *(a)* the deutschmark, *(b)* the dollar and *(c)* all currencies since the first day of each month of 1996 to date; and if he will make a statement. [3080]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* The table gives the percentage increase in the value of the pound against the deutschmark, dollar and the exchange rate index from the first day of each month to close on 6 November—when sterling stood at DM2.49, $1.64 and 91.1 on the ERI. The effective exchange rate index measures the value of sterling against a basket of other currencies on a trade-weighted basis.

Percentage increase since:

1996	*DM*	*$*	*ERI*
January	12	6	10
February	11	9	9
March	11	7	9
April	10	8	9
May	8	9	9
June	6	7	6
July	5	6	5
August	8	5	8
September	8	5	7
October	4	5	5

Working Hours

Ms Quin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of employees working more than 48 hours per week in each year since 1979. [2067]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Joyce Quin, dated 12 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question asking for a time series of the number of employees working more than 48 hours per week.

The available information is shown in the table below.

Employees usually working more than 48 hours per week[1]

Great Britain: spring of each year[2]

(thousands)

	Number
1984	2,740
1985	2,763
1986	2,968
1987	3,126
1988	3,512
1989	3,598
1990	3,606
1991	3,414
1992	3,263
1993	3,360
1994	3,518
1995	3,690
1996	3,793

Notes:

[1] Total usual hours per week including paid and unpaid overtime and excluding meal breaks.

[2] Data for 1979 to 1983 either not available or not consistent with later years.

Source:

Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics.

Landfill Tax

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the landfill operators who have registered their liability for landfill tax, broken down by Customs and Excise region. [3328]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information as requested is not currently held in a form that can be published. The Finance Act 1996 allows the commissioners of Customs and Excise to publish information from the landfill tax register and they will do so as soon as possible.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what sum of money he estimates will be paid to approve environmental bodies through the landfill tax credit scheme in the financial year *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98. [3333]

Mr. Oppenheim: It is estimated that £10 million will be made available through landfill tax credits in 1996–97 and £50 million in 1997–98.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the figures for the average tenure per job in *(a)* manufacturing, *(b)* services and *(c)* general for (i) 1966, (ii) 1970, (iii) 1980, (iv) 1990 and (v) the latest year available. [2815]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Peter Hain, dated 12 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the average tenure per job in manufacturing, services and all industries and services.

Information showing the length of time continuously employed is available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) from 1984. However, of the periods requested, it is only possible to provide accurate averages at Spring 1996. The information is provided in the following tables.

Length of time continuously employed in Great Britain[1]: Spring 1984

	All[2]	Manufacturing	Services
At least lower but less than upper band (thousands):			
Total[3]	23,131	5,767	14,231
3 months or less	1,042	251	655
3 to 6 months	818	193	546
6 to 12 months	1,764	392	1,198
1 to 2 years	1,869	437	1,240
2 to 5 years	4,341	1,062	2,839
5 to 10 years	4,528	1,290	2,752
10 to 20 years	3,988	1,185	2,353
20 years or more	2,071	703	1,036

[1] Based on employees and self-employed. [2] Includes those who did not state their industry.
[3] Includes those who did not state the length of time they were employed.

Length of time continuously employed in Great Britain[1]: Spring 1990

	All[2]	Manufacturing	Services
At least lower but less than upper band (thousands):			
Total[3]	25,871	5,814	16,889
3 months or less	1,526	301	1,060
3 to 6 months	1,258	243	891
6 to 12 months	2,527	519	1,751
1 to 2 years	3,060	671	2,073
2 to 5 years	5,628	1,219	3,778
5 to 10 years	4,155	931	2,711
10 to 20 years	4,980	1,184	3,140
20 years or more	2,693	740	1,454

[1] Based on employees and self-employed. [2] Includes those who did not state their industry.
[3] Includes those who did not state the length of time they were employed.

Length of time continuously employed in Great Britain[1]: Spring 1996

	All[2]	Manufacturing	Services
Average (months)	99	110	91
At least lower but less than upper band (thousands):			
Total[3]	25,225	4,912	17,814
3 months or less	1,227	217	899
3 to 6 months	1,165	214	870
6 to 12 months	2,184	365	1,666
1 to 2 years	2,838	523	2,103
2 to 5 years	4,603	807	3,430
5 to 10 years	5,167	1,025	3,671
10 to 20 years	5,054	1,059	3,391
20 years or more	2,941	695	1,755

[1] Based on employees and self-employed.
[2] Includes those who did not state their industry.
[3] Includes those who did not state the length of time they were employed.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the figures for the change in the level of *(a)* employment, *(b)* male unemployment and *(c)* female unemployment since (i) November 1990 and (ii) December 1992; [2826]

(2) if he will give figures for the change in the level of part-time *(a)* male, *(b)* female and *(c)* total employment and part-time employment since (i) autumn 1990 and (ii) winter 1992–93; [2821]

(3) if he will give figures for the change in the level of full-time *(a)* total, *(b)* male and *(c)* female employment and full-time employment since (i) November 1990 and (ii) December 1992. [2822]

Mrs. Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Peter Hain, dated 12 November:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply to the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent questions for the changes in the levels of employment and unemployment.

Information showing the levels of employment and unemployment, broken down by full and part-time, is available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). Information on employment is published in Table 2 of both the LFS *Historical Supplement 1984–1996* and the October 1996 LFS *First Release*. Information on unemployment is published in Table 20 of the historical supplement and Table 9 of the First Release. Information on the number of people who are looking for work as either full or part-time employees is published in Table 28 of both the historical supplement and the LFS *Quarterly Bulletin*, which is next published on 18th December. Copies of these publications are available in the House of Commons Library.

The claimant unemployment count does not distinguish between full-and part-time unemployment. Monthly seasonally adjusted counts of unemployment are available from the NOMIS database which can be accessed through the House of Commons Library.

Entrust

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff are employed by Entrust and in what positions; and how many further staff appointments will be made and in what positions. [3332]

Mr. Oppenheim: Currently, Entrust employs only an acting chief executive. He will shortly be taking on a secretary. Further staff appointments will be made on the basis of need.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many organisations have enrolled with Entrust as appropriate bodies to receive funding from landfill operators through the landfill tax credits system under the environmental trust scheme to the latest available date. [3331]

Mr. Oppenheim: No bodies have yet enrolled. Application forms will be issued shortly to those that have expressed an interest in enrolment.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the further directors appointed to the environmental bodies regulatory body Entrust, in addition to the appointments announced on 16 October 1996. [3329]

Mr. Oppenheim: In addition to the appointments announced on 16 October, two further people have accepted invitations to join the board of Entrust: Mr. Neil Caldwell, of the Prince's Trust and the Welsh Language Board, and Mr. Donald Reid, a Scottish solicitor.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many organisations have made representations regarding enrolment with Entrust as appropriate bodies to receive funding from landfill operators through the landfill tax credits system under the environmental trust scheme to the latest available date. [3330]

Mr. Oppenheim: As of Monday 4 November, Entrust had received 216 inquiries, of which approximately 85 per cent. were from organisations interested in enrolling.

Births

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many live births there were in each of the last 15 years in Great Britain. [2951]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Frank Field, dated 12 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question asking for the number of live births that occurred in Great Britain in each of the last fifteen years.

The figures requested are shown in the table below.

Live births in Great Britain

Year	*Live births*
1981	703,546
1982	692,127
1983	694,212
1984	701,924
1985	723,093
1986	726,830
1987	747,752
1988	759,789
1989	751,205
1990	772,113
1991	766,241
1992	755,445
1993	736,755
1994	726,382
1995	708,189

Civil Service Relocations

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he takes to monitor the impact of civil service relocations on individual localities. [1306]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* Central considerations for relocation are cost savings, employment and economic benefits.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Cetaceans (Protection)

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the number of harbour porpoises which died as a consequence of the use of monofilament nets in British waters in the last three years; and what international agreements the United Kingdom has agreed to, to ensure the protection of this and other smaller cetacean species. [2340]

Mr. Baldry: No reliable estimate for harbour porpoise deaths in British waters caused by monofilament nets is available. To help address this question, the Ministry is sponsoring the sea mammals research unit to develop a robust cetacean by-catch reporting scheme. SMRU is also a leading partner in an EC-funded project which will document levels of cetacean by-catch in the North sea and evaluate the likely effectiveness of a number of different management approaches aimed at reducing these by-catches.

The UK is party to or subject to several international instruments which include measures to protect small cetaceans. They include the EC habitats directive, Council directive 92/43/EEC; the agreement on the conservation of small cetaceans of the Baltic and North seas, ASCOBANS; the convention on the conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats, the Bern convention; the convention on the conservation of migratory species of wild animals, the Bonn convention; and the convention on international trade in endangered species, CITES.

Varroa Jacobsoni

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which areas of the country are currently assessed as being infected with varroa jacobsoni. [3597]

Mr. Boswell: The areas currently within the statutory infected area include all of Wales and England up to but not including the following counties: Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Cumbria, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear. During the recent search, outbreaks have also been discovered in Cumbria and Greater Manchester, but no decision has yet been taken on any changes to the extent of the SIA.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to offer subsides to beekeepers to assist with the diagnosis and control of varroa mites on bees. [3594]

Mr. Boswell: The Ministry already provides a free testing and diagnosis service for varroa. The cost of treatment is borne by beekeepers.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of varroasis have been reported to his Department in each year since April 1992. [3595]

Mr. Boswell: The annual numbers of varroa positive apiaries reported to the Ministry since April 1992 are as follows:

Year	*Number of cases*
1992	305
1993	600
1994	610
1995	988
Up to and including September 1996	811

Cumulative total 3,314.

BSE

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the expenditure committed to support the agricultural industry as a result of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy crisis, and the proportion of such expenditure which derives form the European Union; [3394]

(2) if he will list, by sector, the expenditure committed as a result of the BSE crisis, separately identifying that paid to *(a)* abattoirs, *(b)* the rendering industry, *(c)* collection centres and *(d)* farmers direct; [3395]

(3) if he will list *(a)* the methods by which compensation has been directed to farmers as a result of the BSE crisis, *(b)* the level of expenditure under these headings and *(c)* the amount of each expenditure item that is recoverable from the European Union. [3396]

Mr. Boswell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 24 July, *Official Report*, column *533*. Subsequent to that reply, additional expenditure has been agreed as follows:

Approximately £160 million from EU funds for direct support to UK beef producers. Over £100 million has already been disbursed through supplementary payments to the beef special premium and suckler cow premium schemes and through the beef marketing payments scheme.

Some £89 million from national funds for direct support to UK beef producers. £60 million of this sum has ben earmarked for distribution to eligible cattle producers under the 1997 hill livestock compensatory allowances scheme.

£16.6 million for extra cold storage capacity to help reduce the backlog of animals awaiting slaughter under the over-30 month scheme.

A detailed breakdown of the latest BSE expenditure forecasts will be given in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's forthcoming Budget statement.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the impact of the BSE crisis on prices paid to farmers for beef cattle. [2451]

Mr. Boswell: Market prices for finished beef cattle in England and Wales have fallen by 15 per cent. to 20 per cent. since the middle of March. There have been greater price reductions for some store cattle and calves. These developments are likely to be attributable to a number of factors, some of them of a seasonal nature. It is not possible separately to identify the impact of BSE. Intervention purchases and measures announced by the Government have had the effect of limiting the extent of price reductions in the beef market and the impact on producers.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what regulations his Department proposes to repeal by the end of 1996; if he proposes to conduct a compliance cost assessment on each regulation repealed; and what is the estimated cost of undertaking a compliance cost assessment to determine the advantages and disadvantages of such a repeal. [3781]

Mr. Boswell: This Ministry has already repealed or simplified a large number of regulations this year. Further measures are planned for next year. Since the effect of repealing or simplifying regulations reduces rather than increases compliance costs, CCAs are not produced. The cost of undertaking a CCA varies from case to case but is generally modest. Because part of the cost falls on the businesses consulted, a full CCA is inappropriate for measures designed to reduce business burdens.

Food Labelling

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to receive the interim report by the Food Advisory Committee on nutritional labelling and health claims; and if he will make a statement. [3590]

Mrs. Browning: The Food Advisory Committee has not been asked to make an interim report on these matters. It is currently reviewing functional foods and health claims and is due to consider the issues again at its December meeting.

Beef Farmers' Incomes

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the reduction in beef farmers' incomes since 20 March. [2583]

Mr. Boswell: Incomes of beef farmers in hill and upland areas are currently being considered as part of the autumn review of the economic prospects of hill farms, and forecasts of incomes for 1996–97 will be deposited in the Library of the House on 26 November.

Estimates of 1996–97 incomes by type of farm for all farms in the United Kingdom will be published in a press notice on 31 January 1997.

Agricultural Holdings

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans his Department has to bring the level at which agricultural holdings are deemed to be economically viable in line with Department of Social Security assessments of personal economic need; and if he will make a statement on his assessment of the advantages of such changes. [3235]

Mr. Boswell: The Department does not define any specific level of economic viability for agricultural holdings and there are no plans to introduce one.

Planning Guidelines

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made of the advantages of giving additional weight to environmental impact in determining planning restrictions on agricultural buildings. [3363]

Mr. Boswell: Planning authorities are already able to take full account of the environmental aspects of development proposals involving agricultural holdings.

British Beef

Sir Robert Hicks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he has taken since 1 August to persuade the major supermarkets and fast-food retail organisations to *(a)* use and *(b)* promote United Kingdom beef; and if he will make a statement. [1629]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 5 November 1996]:* In July, I launched an initiative aimed at restoring consumer confidence in British beef, which I believe needs to start with understanding the concerns of customers and consumers. As a part of this initiative, my officials and I have held a number of discussions with leading supermarkets and fast-food businesses about the measures which the Government have taken to protect public health, and the further steps needed to restore confidence in beef. We have also held seminars with important industry groups.

Forestry Commission (Land Sales)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the plots of Forestry Commission land in Hampshire in each of the last five years which *(a)* were sold and *(b)* were offered for sale, specifying in each case (i) which were sold without public access protected, (ii) the size of the plot and (iii) what consultation was undertaken in advance of the sale;[1968]

(2) if he will list the plots of Forestry Commission land in Hampshire which are currently for sale, specifying in each case the size of the plot and the consultation process to be undertaken in advance of the sale. [1969]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 4 November 1996]:* The subjects of the questions relate to matters undertaken by Forest Enterprise. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. Gordon Cowie, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Gordon M. Cowie to Mr. John Denham, dated 12 November 1996:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your two Questions about Forestry Commission land in Hampshire.[1968] [1969].

1. At Annex A I enclose a list of woodlands sold in Hampshire since 1991. There were no other cases offered for sale during this period. None of these cases were sold with public access protected.

2. At Annex B I enclose a list of land currently for sale, either on the Open Market or by Negotiation.

All the properties listed were notified in the Estates Gazette, and the appropriate consultations with the Local Authority took place in accordance with the Continued Public Access arrangements and Sponsorship procedures. These are explained in the Commission's Access Guidelines, a copy of which is enclosed for your information. A copy is already in the House of Commons Library.

Annex A: Forestry Commission woodlands sold in Hampshire since 1991

Name of Property	*Area (ha)*
1991	
Beaper Wood	10.3
Hill Farm Copse	2.5
Lower Rowborough Copse	7.9
Nunwell Estate (pt)	34.7
Roundabout Copse	8.4
Whitefield Copse	2.0
1992	
Fishpond	7.4
Fleming Estate, Plot 9	11.2
Oxlease	8.1
Tall Boys	16.9
1993	
Ashe Park Copse	37.0
Fleming Estate (pt)	70.1
1994	
Fishers Tiddles Copse	27.5
Fleming (pt) (road imp)	2.0
Itchen Wood	5.3
Ladycross Lodge and Peace Cottage	0.7
Woodhay House Copse	5.0
1995	
There were no sales.	—
1996	
Fleming Estate, Lots 1–11, 13–15	70.0
Pitt Down	15.0

Annex B: Forestry Commission woodland currently for sale either on the open market or by negotiation in Hampshire

Name of property	*Area (ha)*
Bassett Green	1.9
Crawley Down	29.5
Redcap/Catham	14.0
Whitelands Copse	12.0

Beef (Emergency Control) Order 1996

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many prosecutions have been initiated against individuals claimed to be flouting article 2 of the Beef (Emergency Control) Order 1996—statutory instrument 1996/961—and the subsequent amendments. [816]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 6 November 1996]:* This Department has not, to date, initiated any prosecutions under the article 2 of the Beef (Emergency Control) Order 1996 or its replacement orders, the Fresh Meat (Beef Controls) Regulations 1996 and the Fresh Meat (Beef Controls) (No. 2) Regulations 1996.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Prisoners (Costs)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the current annual costs of keeping a prisoner in each of Northern Ireland's prisons; and what are the current average costs in England and Wales and Scotland. [2737]

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for the subject of these questions has been delegated to the Northern Ireland Prison Service under its chief executive, Mr. Alan Shannon. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alan Shannon to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 11 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the current annual cost of keeping a prisoner in each of Northern Ireland's prisons.

The latest available figures relate to the last financial year (1995/96) and are:

	£
HMP Belfast	67,023
HMP Maze	78,388
HMP Magilligan	68,802
HMP Maghaberry	84,579
HM YOC	63,597

Forestry Grants

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for increased financial provision in respect of proposals to increase the forest cover in the United Kingdom; what percentage of this provision is planned to be spent before May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [1846]

Mr. Ancram: Uptake under the forestry grant schemes in Northern Ireland has increased over the past five years from around 500 ha in 1991–92 to more than 800 ha in 1995–96. Expenditure in 1995–96 was some £1.1 million and is expected to be just under £1.2 million in 1996–97. Future spending will be determined following the conclusion of the 1996 public expenditure round. Approximately 10 per cent. of annual provision is spent in each of the first two months of the financial year.

Local Exchange Trading Schemes

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the desirability of providing financial aid and incentives to encourage rural local authorities to set up specific local exchange trading schemes to help farmers during the BSE crisis; and if he will make a statement. [2310]

Mr. Ancram: There have been no representations to the Department to suggest that local exchange trade schemes would be of use.

Beach Materials (Cloghy)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what permission has been given for the removal of sand and rock from the beach at Cloghy, County Down; and if he will make a statement about the removal of beach materials. [2399]

Mr. Moss: None. Much of Cloghy beach is held by Ards borough council under lease from the Crown Estate Commissioners. The removal of sand and rock is therefore a matter for the council.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the rocks on the beach at Cloghy, County Down form part of a breakwater; and what erosion there is at the beach near No. 9 Manser road, Cloghy. [2400]

Mr. Moss: I understand that, while there are several small isolated lengths of rock armour along the beach at Cloghy, which offer some protection to the adjacent sea wall, no such rock armour is present opposite to 9 Manser road, where a grassed area separates the beach from the road. I am also advised that the area in question is in private ownership.

Stalking Legislation

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consultation he has undertaken with the Home Secretary in order to have Northern Ireland included in the proposed stalking legislation. [2454]

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. and learned Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 23 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *256*. The separate Northern Ireland consultation paper was published in September, with a closing date for comments of 2 December. When all these have been received, I shall consider what legislation is required for Northern Ireland and how best to proceed.

Fair Employment (Teachers)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many teaching jobs otherwise exempted form the fair employment legislation are

required, by the internal guidelines of *(a)* the five education and library boards and *(b)* the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools to have appointments made under fair employment procedures. [2458]

Mr. Ancram: The guidance procedures to be used in individual cases is a matter for the relevant employing authority, and details are not available centrally.

Waiting Times

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were referred by general practitioners for *(a)* orthopaedic operations, *(b)* coronary bypass surgery and *(c)* coronary angiograms in each health and social services trust in Northern Ireland (i) between 1 April and 30 September 1996 and (ii) between 1 April 1995 and 31 March 1996; how many of those in *(a)* have been placed on a waiting list; how long they have been waiting; and what is the expected date for their operations. [2387]

Mr. Moss: General practitioners usually refer patients for consultant out-patient appointments in the first instance, with decisions regarding any subsequent action, including a decision to place on a waiting list for treatment, being taken following assessment at a consultant out-patient clinic.

In the year ending 31 March 1996—latest figures available—there were 24,440 GP written referrals for out-patient appointments in the trauma and orthopaedics specialty and 7,676 in the cardiology specialty. Patients are not referred by GPs for coronary angiograms. The procedure which an individual patient may require is not determined until he/she is seen by the cardiologist at the first appointment. The latter information is not available centrally. In the cardiac surgery specialty, there were 823 consultant referrals for out-patient appointments. GPs do not refer directly to the cardiac surgery specialty—they refer patients to a cardiologist in the first instance. It is not possible to break down these overall Northern Ireland figures into the particular trust wherein the referring GPs are located.

The numbers of those waiting for a first out-patient appointment at 31 March 1996 in these specialties, together with the time waiting for those who had not cancelled an appointment offered or who had not failed to attend such an appointment are given in the table:

Specialty	*Total*	*Patients who had cancelled or failed to attend a previous appointment*	*Patients who has not cancelled or failed to attend a previous appointment*	*Time waiting of those who had not cancelled or failed to attend*[1]		
				< 6 mths per cent.	*> 6–12 mths per cent.*	*> 12 mths + per cent.*
Orthopaedics	3,010	602	2,408	82	9	9
Cardiology	1,783	239	1,544	97	3	1
Cardiac Surgery	74	19	55	42	36	22

[1] Percentages may not sum to 100 per cent. as a result of rounding. Percentages exclude a small proportion of cases where waiting time for admission was not known.

The waiting times for admissions of elective in-patients in the trauma and orthopaedics specialty during the year ending 31 March 1996 are given in the table, with the waiting times for admission of those elective in-patients whose primary procedures in the same period were coronary bypass surgery or coronary angiogram.

Specialty	*Total*	*Waiting time for admission*[1]		
		<6 months Per cent.	*>6 <12 months Per cent.*	*>12 months Per cent.*
Trauma and orthopaedics procedure	8,988	73	21	6
Coronary bypass	713	65	28	6
Angiogram	974	97	2	(<1)

[1] Percentages may not sum to 100 per cent. as a result of rounding. Percentages exclude a small proportion of cases where waiting time for admission was not known.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the length of national health service waiting lists in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [2389]

Mr. Moss: The table shows that between 30 June 1995 and 30 June 1996—the latest available figures—the overall number waiting for treatment changed very little.

	Number waiting for first appointment	*For ordinary admission*	*For day case admission*
June 1995	67,750	21,070	14,688
June 1996	62,765	21,687	16,890

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he will take to reduce the waiting lists for coronary angiograms in each of the health and social services trusts in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [2388]

Mr. Moss: Information is not available on waiting lists for individual procedures. However, the table gives the number of elective in-patients who had coronary angiograms as their primary procedure in the last three years and the time they had to wait between the decision to admit them to hospital and the date of their admission. The table shows that there has been a 20 per cent. increase in the number of angiograms performed over this period.

Coronary angiograms

	Total	Waiting time for admission[1] 6 months Per cent.	6 to 12 months Per cent.	12 months + Per cent.
1993–94	814	95	5	(–1)
1994–95	799	96	3	1
1995–96	974	97	2	(–1)

[1] Percentages may not sum to 100 per cent. as a result of rounding. Percentages exclude a small proportion of cases where waiting time for admission was not known.

Blood Spreading

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the cause of the unusual smell at Ballymaglaff road, Comber; what substances have been spread on that land; and if he will make a statement. [2444]

Mr. Ancram: I understand that the smell at Ballymaglaff road, Comber arose from the spreading of blood on land.

The practice of spreading blood on land as an agricultural fertiliser is an acceptable method of disposal.

Educational Qualifications

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps his Department is taking to ensure that the Irish Republic gives full mutual recognition to educational qualifications obtained in Northern Ireland; and what issues are outstanding. [2456]

Mr. Ancram: The Republic of Ireland is currently establishing new arrangements for the certification of vocational and other qualifications. Officials of my Department have initiated contact with their counterparts and will be raising issues relating to mutual recognition.

Queen's Speech

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which of the Bills announced in the Queen's Speech and not yet published will include Northern Ireland in their extent; and what were the reasons for not including Northern Ireland in the others. [2453]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Excluding the two Scottish measures in the Queen's Speech, nine of the remaining 12 Bills will apply wholly or in part to Northern Ireland. The nine Bills in question are: the Benefit Fraud Bill, the Compensation Recovery Bill, the Crime (Sentences) Bill, the Decommissioning Bill, the Education Bill, the Merchant Shipping and Maritime Security Bill, the National Heritage Bill, the Police Bill and the Primary Health Care Bill.

The possibility of extending the Firearms (Amendment) Bill to Northern Ireland is still being considered.

Students

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the effect on the number of students from the Irish Republic attending colleges in Northern Ireland of the introduction of free tuition in the Republic. [2457]

Mr. Ancram: None.

Local Government Structure

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy to review Northern Ireland's local government structure so as to reform the functions and powers of the district councils in line with the proposed rearrangements for the education and library boards. [2627]

Mr. Moss: The Government keep the arrangements for local government in Northern Ireland under continual review. I see no case at present for reforming the functions and powers of district councils.

IRA

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the implications for his policies on peace and reconciliation of the IRA's continuing activities. [2628]

Mr. Ancram: The Government's declared aim is to achieve peace, prosperity and reconciliation in Northern Ireland by pursuing a range of complementary policies, including the search for a comprehensive political settlement which can command widespread support. This has been and will continue to be the Government's policy, irrespective of the level of IRA activity.

Stormont Talks

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the progress of the talks at Castle buildings, Stormont. [2637]

Mr. Ancram: The participants have all made clear their total and absolute commitment to the principles of democracy and non-violence set out in paragraph 20 of the report of the international body; they have agreed rules of procedure, established a business committee and settled the agenda for the remainder of the opening plenary. They are currently addressing proposals regarding the decommissioning of illegal weapons.

The talks process provides the best opportunity for a generation of reaching a comprehensive and widely acceptable political settlement which could underpin lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications were made in respect of the special programme for agriculture and rural development—SPARD—from 22 March 1995 to 24 March 1995; how many have been approved; and of these how many have received payments. [2708]

Mr. Ancram: A total of 5,380 applications were received under the sub-programme for agriculture and rural development on 23 and 24 March 1995; 4,760 have been approved to date and, of these, 610 farmers have received payment of grant.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to expedite outstanding payments in respect of the special programme for agriculture and rural development in respect of applications which were forwarded between 22 March and 24 March. [2706]

Mr. Ancram: Claims for grant based on applications received on 23 or 24 March 1995 have, since 1 April 1996, been held in date order of receipt and will be paid in this order as financial resources permit. Nevertheless, the Department will make a special effort to make early payments in cases where there are exceptional circumstances. The expenditure on the SPARD schemes is monitored on a monthly basis, and if it becomes clear that the funds available are in excess of that required to pay all of the claims based on applications received prior to 23 March 1995, the balance will be used to pay the outstanding claims arising from applications received on 23 or 24 March 1995.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications were made in respect of the special programme for agriculture and rural development from 1 April 1994 to its suspension on 22 March 1995; of these how many were approved; and what was the total cost of the approved schemes. [2707]

Mr. Ancram: Some 5,635 applications were received under the sub-programme for agriculture and rural development from the date the scheme opened on 14 November 1994 up to 22 March 1995; 5,586 applications have been approved and the total cost of the approved applications is £31.5 million.

Neonatal and Perinatal Mortality

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the *(a)* neonatal and *(b)* perinatal mortality rates for the last four years by each health and social services board. [2669]

Sir John Wheeler: The information is as follows:

Neonatal and perinatal death rates Northern Ireland

	1992		*1993*		*1994*		*1995*[1]	
	Neonatal	*Perinatal*	*Neonatal*	*Perinatal*	*Neonatal*	*Perinatal*	*Neonatal*	*Perinatal*
Eastern health and social services board	3.8	8.7	3.9	7.3	5.1	10.7	7.6	12.3
Northern health and social services board	3.5	7.6	3.5	9.4	4.6	9.6	4.0	8.5
Southern health and social services board	3.8	8.5	6.2	8.8	3.7	10.0	3.8	8.6
Western health and social services board	5.6	7.8	7.5	10.9	2.1	7.1	5.0	11.0

Neonatal rate per 1,000 live births. Perinatal rates per 1,000 live and still-births.
[1] Provisional.

Dementia

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the status of the report "Dementia in Northern Ireland", to what extent it reflects Government policy on the matter; and what resources have been allocated to deal with the problem of dementia in each of the years 1993–94 to 1996–97. [3323]

Mr. Moss: "Dementia in Northern Ireland" is the report of a team brought together by the Department of Health and Social Services in 1994 to examine policy and make recommendations on the development of services. The report has been accepted by the Department and its recommendations have been adopted as the basis for its policy in this area.

Financial provision for dementia is subsumed within overall allocations to health and social services boards, and it is a matter for each board to allocate resources within its area on the basis of assessed need and competing priorities.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the incidence of dementia within each of the board areas in Northern Ireland; and what the average per capita funding has been for *(a)* residential care and *(b)* respite care in each board area during the years 1993–94 to 1995–96 in respect of dementia. [3325]

Mr. Moss: Precise information about the incidence of dementia is not available as many sufferers are not in contact with services. However, it is estimated that in 1994 there were 12,500 people in Northern Ireland suffering from the disease. The information requested on funding is not available.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what resources have been allocated towards a public awareness campaign relating to dementia. [3326]

Mr. Moss: Since 1991, the Department of Health and Social Services has provided funding for the Alzheimer's Disease Society in Northern Ireland, one of whose main aims is to raise public awareness of the disease.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the respective roles of *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the boards and *(c)* health trusts in dealing with the problem of dementia. [3324]

Mr. Moss: The Department of Health and Social Services sets and monitors strategic plans for implementation of its policy on dementia. In drawing up the regional strategy for health and social well-being 1997 to 2002, the Department has asked boards and trusts to conduct a detailed audit during 1997 of the needs of people with dementia and the services available to meet those needs. Building on this baseline, the Department intends to establish quantifiable targets for the remainder of the strategy period.

Farmers' Income

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the changes in farmers' income in real terms for each month since January 1990; and if he will make a statement. [1583]

Mr. Ancram: Estimates of farm incomes in Northern Ireland are obtained on an annual basis from the farm business survey and are published each year in "Agriculture in the United Kingdom", "Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom", the "Statistical Review of Northern Ireland Agriculture" and "Farm Incomes in Northern Ireland", copies of which are available in the Library.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many recommendations have been made by the Government of the Irish Republic under article 6 of the Anglo–Irish Agreement in each year since it was signed; how many persons were appointed in each year as a result of those recommendations; and of these how many are still serving in each body. [1964]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 1 November 1996]:*

The information now available is as follows:

Year	*Number of recommendations*	*Number of appointments resulting from recommendations*
1986	45	5
1987	21	3
1988	15	4
1989	6	4
1990	1	0
1991	21	3
1992	34	8
1993	30	7
1994	17	2
1995	53	13
1996[1]	41	6

[1] Up to 30 October 1996.

Thirty-three of those appointments were still current as at 30 October 1996.

The figures for recommendations relate to nominations made rather than persons nominated. Some persons were nominated a number of times.

Orange Parade

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary are members of (i) the Orange Order and (ii) the Black Institution; and of these how many were on duty at Garvaghy road at any time during the period 6 July to 11 July. [1772]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 6 November 1996]:* It is not known how many members of the RUC are members of the Orange Order or Black Institution.

RUC (Sick Leave)

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many members of the RUC were on sick leave in each week since 1 January. [1780]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 6 November 1996]:* The information is not available in the form requested. However, it is possible to provide information which shows the average work days lost per member of the RUC in the first three quarters of 1996:

1 January 1996 to 31 March 1996: 3.24 days

1 April 1996 to 30 June 1996: 3.15 days

1 July 1996 to 30 September 1996: 3.61 days

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimates he has made of the sums to be spent in the current financial year, which will be contingent upon the Government gaining parliamentary consent to *(a)* the incorporation of the further education colleges, *(b)* education vouchers, and *(c)* its proposals on school boards. [2734]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* Estimated expenditure contingent on parliamentary consent is:

(a) Nil

(b) £23,000

There are no proposals regarding school boards.

RUC

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to publish the RUC's fundamental review of policing; with whom he plans to discuss its findings; when decisions will be taken in respect of it, and by whom. [2736]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 6 November 1996]:* It has been necessary to re-examine the fundamental review of policing to take account of the ending of the Provisional IRA ceasefire and the public order difficulties of the summer. Once that process is completed and the review's recommendations have been approved, I shall consult the Chief Constable and the Police Authority for Northern Ireland about when the main findings will be made public as a contribution to the wider public debate on policing. Decisions on the review will fall to the members of the tripartite structure; implementation of specific recommendations will depend upon the wider environment.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Lone Parents

8. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to help lone parents into work. [1705]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Successive changes to the benefits system have helped over 200,000 lone parents to move off income support into work since 1992. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has recently announced that from April 1997, we will be piloting a major new scheme, parent plus, which will involve the private sector and initially help up to 100,000 lone parents on income support who wish to return to work.

Social Chapter

13. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the effect on his Department's budget of the introduction of the social chapter. [1710]

Mr. Lilley: Signing the social chapter would destroy jobs and so push up my Department's expenditure on benefits to the unemployed.

Benefit Fraud Hotline

14. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many responses have been received by the benefits cheats hotline. [1711]

18. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many calls have so far been received by the beat-a-cheat hotline. [1715]

22. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what responses he has had to the beat–a–cheat hotline. [1719]

Mr. Heald: Since the launch on 5 August 1996, the number of calls to the national benefit fraud hotline have exceeded 91,000 in the first 12 weeks.

Jobseeker's Allowance

16. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures have been taken to monitor the effects of the new jobseeker's allowance. [1713]

Mr. Roger Evans: We have set in place an extensive programme of monitoring and evaluation, to enable us to ensure that the jobseeker's allowance is achieving its policy objectives.

State Pension

17. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultations he has had with the Government Actuary about the cost of paying the state pension from age 60 years; and if he will make a statement. [1714]

Mr. Heald: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) earlier today.

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received in favour of a state pension age starting at 60 years. [1695]

Mr. Heald: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State received one letter from the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) on 30 August advocating allowing people to claim state pension from age 60, but envisaging that the basic state pension would be reduced to offset the extra cost.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the future of the basic state pension. [?181]

Mr. Heald: I refer the hon. Member to the oral reply I gave the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) today.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which countries of the EU pay state pensions at a lower rate than the United Kingdom. [1699]

Mr. Heald: Because of the diverse nature of pension state schemes within the European Union, it is not possible to make a meaningful comparison.

Child Benefit

20. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the provision of child benefit. [1717]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: We have a manifesto commitment to pay child benefit to all families in respect of all children, and we have honoured that pledge. We believe that all families with dependent children should receive some help from either the tax or the benefit system, a principle recognised throughout Europe.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in respect of how many children new claims for child benefit were made in each of the past 15 years; how many child benefit claims were disallowed in each of the past 15 years; and what was the estimated take-up of child benefit in each of the past 15 years. [3390]

Mr. Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Child benefit take-up rates 1981–1994

	[1] *Take-up rate for children aged 1–15*	[2] *Take-up rate for children under age 1*
1981	99.7	97.9
1982	99.6	97.5
1983	99.7	97.0
1984	99.7	98.3
1985	99.7	97.0
1986	99.5	97.8
1987	99.5	97.8
1988	99.3	96.6
1989	99.1	96.9
1990	98.9	97.5
1991	98.8	96.9
1992	98.9	96.1
1993	98.8	97.3
1994	98.7	95.1

[1] Rates calculated from population data, Office for National Statistics.

[2] Figures for children under age 1 reflect an average delay in claiming of six weeks and is not therefore inconsistent with the 1–15 take-up rate.

New claims for child benefit (CHB) 1980 to 1995

Thousands

	Total of new claims for CHB in each year
1980	1,093
1981	968
1982	1,020
1983	1,009
1985	1,003
1986	1,022
1987	1,033
1988	1,041
1989	997
1990	1,062
1991	1,063
1992	1,025

New claims for child benefit (CHB) 1980 to 1995

Thousands

	Total of new claims for CHB in each year
1993	1,000
1994	992
1995	981

1. Data are not available for 1984 due to industrial action in that year.

2. The figures include claims made on the birth of a child, claims from families entering Great Britain and repeat claims following a period of disentitlement.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

23. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he has received during the past six months on the effects of the reduced earnings allowance; and if he will make a statement. [1720]

Mr. Roger Evans: A number of right hon. and hon. Members have written to Ministers since the amendments to regulations from 24 March which brought in fairer rules for the transfer of people on reduced earnings allowance to retirement allowance.

26. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the numbers of people who have lost entitlement to reduced earnings allowance as a result of changes to legislation. [1723]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. However, since the amendment regulations came into force from 24 March up to the end of September, approximately 21,000 over pensionable age reduced earnings allowance recipients who have given up regular employment have transferred to retirement allowance including both reviewed cases and those attaining pension age on or after 24 March.

Housing Benefit

24. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the effectiveness of his Department's attempts to combat fraud in housing benefit. [1721]

Mr. Heald: We fully support local authorities in their efforts to prevent and detect fraud and abuse of housing benefit. In 1995–96, authorities made fraud savings of £224 million and earned £28 million in extra subsidy for their work through the incentive scheme we have introduced. In March this year, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a comprehensive strategy for tackling housing benefit fraud. We are seeking further powers to help authorities fight fraud in the benefit fraud Bill which we shall shortly lay before the House.

27. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will report on the progress of the interdepartmental review of proposed changes to housing benefit for people living in supported accommodation. [1724]

Mr. Roger Evans: The terms of reference for the Review of supported accommodation were announced on 22 October. We have discussed the role played by housing benefit in funding supported accommodation with housing providers, umbrella organisations, local authority associations and welfare rights groups throughout Great Britain. The anecdotal evidence is that housing benefit does meet charges for support which enables people to remain in the community. This is consistent with findings of qualitative research carried out by the centre for housing policy which ware published on 31 October. We have commissioned the centre for research in social policy at Loughborough university to carry out research attempting to quantify the extent of this expenditure whilst the interdepartmental review will continue to consider all aspects of the funding of supported accommodation and report upon where the sustainable balance should lie between social security and other funding sources in supported accommodation and, if necessary, clarify legislation.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to encourage further competition in the administration of housing and council tax benefits. [4111]

Mr. Evans: Some local authorities have expressed concern that existing legislation prevents contractors who undertake housing and council tax benefit administration from carrying out determinations of benefit entitlement. This causes unnecessary double handling of claims and reduces the efficiency of contracts which local authorities are able to negotiate. We therefore propose to allow contractors to perform such determinations. In particular, this will enable local authorities to run pilots to establish whether they would wish to see such work permanently contracted out.

This change, allied to the proposals which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has announced today for changes to the compulsory competitive tendering framework for local authority professional services and housing management, will create a climate in which local authorities are able to negotiate more efficient arrangements for the administration of these benefits.

We will open consultations shortly with the local authority associations with a view to bring forward an order under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994.

Benefits Agency Medical Services

25. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will make a statement on the contractorisation of the Benefits Agency medical services; [1722]

(2) if companies invited to take over the work of the Benefits Agency medical services will be encouraged to take over the adjudication functions of the agency; [766]

(3) what proposals his Department has to contract out the adjudication function of the Benefits Agency medical services. [736]

Mr. Roger Evans: Many adjudicating medical practitioners are already fee-paid doctors working under contract. It is proposed to include the adjudication functions of the Benefits Agency medical services in the scope of work to be contracted out. This will be set out in the statement of service requirements to be issued shortly by the Benefits Agency. Including the medical adjudication function in the contract offers the greatest prospect of increased efficiency, while safeguarding the integrity and standards of decision making and protecting customers' rights. Decisions must continue to be taken as now in accordance with the facts and the law, with rights of appeal to an independent body.

We see no reason in principle to rule out involvement of the private sector in decision making. But we will want to examine this very carefully on a case-by-case basis to ensure that standards of decision making are maintained or improved. We make no presumption about the future extent of private sector involvement.

Independent Living Fund

28. **Mr. Berry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will require the independent living fund to make payments which take into account the employer's responsibilities in respect of recipients who employ their own care staff. [1725]

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he proposes to take to ensure that payments from the independent living fund cover employer's liabilities in the same way as direct payments from local authorities under the Community Care (Direct Payments) Act 1996 will do. [2427]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: We have no plans to do so. The trustees of the independent living funds have discretion to make payments towards client's care costs, and they currently help over 15,000 severely disabled people at a cost of £115 million.

Means-tested Benefits

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the number of people dependent on means-tested benefits, *(a)* at present and *(b)* in 1979. [1712]

Mr. Roger Evans: There were 8.45 million recipients of one or more income-related benefits in May 1995. A direct comparison with 1979 is not possible.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received since announcing the outcome of his review into the system of cold weather payments, with specific reference to the highlands and islands of Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [1716]

Mr. Roger Evans: Since the changes were announced on 14 October, we have received one representation relating to the highlands and islands of Scotland, from the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye.

Benefits (Domestic Pets)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to include an element in social security payments for the upkeep of a domestic pet. [1718]

Mr. Roger Evans: No. Income support does not identify separate amounts for specific expenditure items. Claimants are free to manage their income according to their preferences.

Family Incomes

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the income that an average family in rented accommodation needs to be better off than with nobody in employment receiving *(a)* the jobseeker's allowance and *(b)* income support. [2816]

Mr. Roger Evans: People in work on low incomes will usually be entitled to housing and council tax benefits to help ensure work is worthwhile.

A wide range of factors can affect a family's income in and out of work and it is difficult to illustrate the effect of these by using a single typical family as an example. A range of examples is provided in the published tax benefit model tables, April 1996, a copy of which is available in the Library. The April 1996 tables do not cover jobseeker's allowance, but the position will be the same for this purpose as for families receiving income support.

Benefit Statistics

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many households received *(a)* means-tested benefits, *(b)* income support, *(c)* family credit, *(d)* housing benefit and *(e)* council tax benefit in (i) 1992 and (ii) 1996, in respect of (1) each region in Great Britain and (2) Great Britain as a whole; and what proportion of the total number of households this represented in each case; [3327]

(2) how many households received (i) any means-tested benefit, (ii) income support, (iii) family credit,(iv) housing benefit and (v) council tax benefit in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1996 in each standard region of Great Britain and in Great Britain as a whole; and what proportion of the total number of households this represented in each case. [3100]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested. A breakdown of family credit date by Government standard statistical region could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Such information as is available is in the tables:

Table 1: Numbers on means-tested benefits—May 1992

Thousands

	One or more means-tested benefit	*Income support*	*Family credit*	*Housing benefit*	*Community charge benefit*
Great Britain	8,410	5,088	397	4,325	6,564
England	7,040	4,282	325	3,569	5,561
Scotland	930	519	47	539	657
Wales	440	287	25	217	346
Standard GSS region					
North	n/a	318	n/a	304	458
North West	n/a	693	n/a	547	890
Yorkshire and Humberside	n/a	463	n/a	411	667
East Midlands	n/a	321	n/a	266	457
West Midlands	n/a	493	n/a	400	681
East Anglia	n/a	143	n/a	127	209
South East (ex London)	n/a	706	n/a	574	957
London (Inner and Outer)	n/a	792	n/a	659	764
South West	n/a	353	n/a	282	479
DSS administrative regions					
Northern	n/a	n/a	72	n/a	n/a
North Western	n/a	n/a	65	n/a	n/a
Midlands	n/a	n/a	74	n/a	n/a
East Anglia and South East	n/a	n/a	83	n/a	n/a
South West	n/a	n/a	32	n/a	n/a

Table 2: Proportion of households on means-tested benefits—May 1992

Per cent.

	One or more means-tested benefit	*Income support*	*Family credit*	*Housing benefit*	*Community charge benefit*
Great Britain	29	18	1	15	23
England	28	17	1	14	22
Scotland	36	20	2	21	25
Wales	32	21	2	16	25

Table 3: Numbers on means-tested benefits—May 1995

Thousands

	One or more means-tested benefit	*Income support*	*Family credit*	*Housing benefit*	*Council tax benefit*
Great Britain	8,440	5,670	608	4,734	5,624
England	7,090	4,790	504	3,953	4,756
Scotland	890	555	68	543	581
Wales	460	325	36	238	288
Standard GSS region					
North	n/a	354	n/a	322	393
North West	n/a	757	n/a	597	766
Yorkshire and Humberside	n/a	513	n/a	438	545
East Midlands	n/a	357	n/a	287	375
West Midlands	n/a	548	n/a	425	558
East Anglia	n/a	163	n/a	140	178
South East (Ex London)	n/a	781	n/a	650	803
London (Inner and Outer)	n/a	936	n/a	774	741
South West	n/a	380	n/a	320	397
DSS administrative regions					
Northern	n/a	n/a	110	n/a	n/a
North Western	n/a	n/a	97	n/a	n/a
Midlands	n/a	n/a	113	n/a	n/a
East Anglia and South East	n/a	n/a	136	n/a	n/a
South West	n/a	n/a	47	n/a	n/a

Table 4: Proportion of households on means-tested benefits—May 1995

Per cent.

	One or more means-tested benefit	*Income support*	*Family credit*	*Housing benefit*	*Council tax benefit*
Great Britain	29	19	2	16	19
England	28	19	2	16	19
Scotland	35	22	3	21	23
Wales	31	22	2	16	19

Notes:

1. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand, except figures for one or more means-tested benefit which are rounded to the nearest ten thousand. Due to rounding totals may not tally.
2. Sample sizes: income support/family credit 5 per cent. Housing benefit/council tax benefit 1 per cent.
3. Means-tested benefits are defined as income support, family credit, housing benefit, and community charge benefit/council tax benefit.
4. Household information is not available since benefits are paid to a benefit unit. A benefit unit may be a single person or a couple. There may be more than one benefit unit within a household.
5. Overlaps between benefits have been taken into account in producing the number of benefit units receiving one or more means-tested benefit. There will be a considerable overlap between individual benefit numbers, as a person may receive one or more means-tested benefit.
6. Council tax benefit replaced community charge benefit from April 1993.
7. English regions used for income support, housing benefit, community charge benefit and council tax benefit are Government standard statistical regions. For family credit these are DSS administrative regions.
8. Housing benefit/community charge/council tax benefit figures include estimates due to the data collection procedure in Scotland.
9. n/a = not applicable.

Sources:

1. Income support statistics quarterly enquiry May 1995.
2. Income support statistics annual enquiry 1992.
3. Family credit 5 per cent. sample of awards.
4. Housing benefit management information system annual 1 per cent. sample enquiries, with and without income support taken at the end of May of each year given.
5. Office of national statistics, family resources survey, family expenditure survey.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the rules and regulations he proposes to repeal or amend by means of reference to the Deregulation Committee before the end of 1996; and if he will make a statement. [3783]

Mr. Heald: The Department has no plans to repeal or amend any rules or regulations by means of reference to the Deregulation Committee by the end of 1996.

Privatisation

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his plans for proceeding with the privatisation of the departmental estate. [4047]

Mr. Lilley: The three shortlisted bidders have today been issued with an invitation to negotiate along with supporting documentation about the Department's property assets and accommodation requirements. The bidders are being asked to make proposals according to the principles of the private finance initiative where the emphasis is on service delivery to specified standards rather than detailed specification of how the services are to be delivered. Overall, the aim of the transfer is to enable the Department to make significant savings in the costs of accommodation services, in part through lower service charges and in part through an immediate return to the taxpayer reflecting the value of these assets. The assets are to be transferred to the successful bidder which will be required to provide a payment of £250 million on completion of the contract to realise immediately an appropriate proportion of their underlying value. The Government also expect that the private sector will be able to provide accommodation services more effectively than if they had remained in-house and will be better able to realise additional development potential. The service charge will therefore reflect this greater efficiency and development potential and the costs to the bidder of raising the capital sum. Specifying a set capital payment will, however, simplify the bidding process for both the bidders and Government and reduce the financial risk to the Government over the lifetime of the contract.

Compensation Reforms

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to ensure that proposals to reform compensation recovery are implemented in the current parliamentary Session. [1613]

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on 7 November, *Official Report*, columns *681–82*.

Building Societies

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the letter of 14 October from the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, what external legal advice he has received on potential discrimination caused by *(a)* payment of bonus shares being made only once to a named building society member and *(b)* building society requirements that a person with a mental impairment incapable of handling his own affairs is unable to be the first or sole named person on an account. [2748]

Mr. Burt: None. As with all legislation, it is for individual service providers to seek any legal advice they might require on their responsibilities.

Mr. Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish in the *Official Report* the letter of 14 October from the Minister of State for Social Security and Disabled People relating to the question of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and building societies. [2749]

Mr. Burt: Yes. The letter reads as follows:

Thank you for your letter of 23 July concerning disabled people and building societies. I apologise for the delay in providing a full reply but, as I explained in my letter of 30th September, these matters are both important and complex. They have, therefore, necessitated investigation with the Treasury, the Building Societies Commission and the Building Societies Association.

The question of the treatment of some disabled customers by building societies first arose earlier in the summer in discussions between my officials and representatives of disability organisations. The NDS has also been taking an interest.

The main problem concerns building society accounts held by disabled people but operated under a power of attorney. In certain circumstances, where the account is held in the name of the attorney, it may be that the disabled person does not receive an allocation of bonus shares on the flotation of a society. This would therefore appear to be less favourable treatment contrary to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA).

First I should explain that it is not always the case that the person with power of attorney necessarily becomes the member of a building society. An individual may appoint an attorney to deal with his account. However, if the account is held in the name of that individual he or she will remain the member. Alternatively if the account is opened by and held in the name of the attorney then the attorney would be the member and, therefore, be the person entitled to vote and to receive the benefits of membership.

Similarly, a trustee or someone else acting on behalf of a disabled person may be the sole or first named person on the building society account, which would mean that they, rather than the disabled person, would be entitled to privileges of membership including the payment of bonus shares or cash.

It is not discriminatory in itself for payment of bonus shares or cash to be made to someone acting on behalf of a disabled person rather than the disabled person himself. A trustee, attorney or other person first named on an account is under an obligation to account to the beneficial owner of the account for any benefits received. The individual should not suffer financially and is not receiving the service (the perks of membership) on less favourable terms.

Further, the payment of bonus shares or cash to the first named member is a requirement under the Building Societies Act 1986. Therefore the building societies would be acting "in pursuance of an enactment" and would come with section 59 of the DDA. This section provides that if you are required to do something under another law this takes precedence over anything required by the DDA. In any event, the practice in itself is unlikely to be discriminatory for the reasons set out above.

The difficulty comes in the situation that you identify in your letter, where the attorney or other trustee or first named person also has an account in his or her own right and receives a single benefit in respect of both accounts. This is usually the result of a society's decision to make its distribution scheme "member based", that is to say, linked to the entitlement of a member to vote on the transfer proposals (in building societies, as mutual organisations, members have by law only one vote regardless of the amount held in an account or of the number of accounts held). In the case of the Cheltenham & Gloucester, however, the society elected to make its scheme "account based", with each qualifying account, rather than each qualifying member, being entitled to receive a cash payment calculated in accordance with the terms of that scheme, so that a member with a number of different accounts received a payment in respect of each account.

The decisions as to which type of transfer arrangement and scheme to adopt is one for the society—and for its members—to vote on. It is not a statutory requirement in the same way as the payment of bonus shares or cash to the first named member.

The payment of bonus shares being made only once to each named member, however many accounts he may have on his own or others' behalf, may well result in discrimination contrary to the DDA, in that a disabled person may not receive the benefits of membership in the same way as a non-disabled person.

Finally, if it is a building society's requirement that a person with a mental impairment, who is not capable of handling his own affairs, cannot be the first or sole named on the account, it is possible that there is discrimination under the DDA. The disabled person is being offered less favourable terms, for a reason relating to his disability, because he does not have the same choices in the opening of his account. However, this less favourable treatment may be justified under section 20(4)(b) of the DDA. If a building society reasonably believes that a disabled person is incapable of entering into an enforceable agreement, it would seem reasonable to treat that person differently in the opening of his account and require that someone capable deals with these important matters on his behalf. Regulations provide, however, that this subsection does not apply where an attorney is acting on behalf of a disabled person.

As you are aware, the relevant sections of the DDA do not come into force until the 2nd of December. If, after this date, a disabled person can show that they have received less favourable treatment in terms of not receiving the benefits of membership, he or she may be able to argue that they have been unjustifiably discriminated against contrary to the DDA. Ultimately, it will be for the courts to decide whether discrimination has occurred.

I understand that the Building Societies Association has already identified a number of these issues and will shortly be issuing guidance to it members. I will be taking steps to ensure that both the Building Societies Association and the Building Societies Commission are aware of all the potential issues.

Thank you for this opportunity to explain the situation. I apologise again for the delay in replying.

Incapacity and Unemployment Benefits

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people failed to qualify for *(a)* incapacity benefit and *(b)* unemployment benefit in (i) 1994–95 and (ii) 1995–96 because they failed the contribution conditions for benefit; and in each case, how many of these failed (1) the first contribution condition and (2) the second contribution condition. [2781]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table:

	Number
Claimants who failed the contribution conditions and were refused incapacity benefit from April 1995 to March 1996	[1]389,000
Unemployed claimants as at 11 May 1995 not in receipt of unemployment benefit who failed the contribution conditions	[2]1,127,000
Unemployed claimants as at 9 May 1996 not in receipt of unemployment benefit who failed the contribution conditions.	[2]1,081,000

Source:
[1] Monthly scan of incapacity benefit computer.
[2] Five per cent. sample of unemployed claimants.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the impact of the Social Security Benefit (Computation of Earnings) Regulations 1996 and the Social Security (Invalid Care Allowance) Amendment Regulations 1996; how many people he estimates will *(a)* gain and *(b)* suffer financial loss as a result of these regulations; and what are the revenue projections relating to these measures. [2785]

Mr. Roger Evans: There are insufficient data on which to base reliable estimates. However, we anticipate that the numbers of gainers and losers will be small. The revenue implications of the regulations are expected to be broadly cost neutral.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of *(a)* the cost and *(b)* the numbers gaining from raising the lower capital threshold from £3,000 to £8,000 for disability working allowance claims. [2784]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The estimated cost of raising the lower capital limit for disability working allowance from £3,000 to £18,000 is approximately £1 million at 1996–97 prices and benefit levels, for around 1,000 cases.

Notes

1. The 1994–95 family resources survey has been used to estimate the effect of this proposal. However the data do not contain a sufficient number of DWA cases to allow the direct modelling of DWA options on the policy simulation model. Instead, the changes have been modelled using all childless benefit units as a proxy for DWA cases without children, and all family credit benefit units as a proxy for DWA cases with children.

2. The use of proxy groups means that these estimates are subject to relatively wide margins of error. Estimates will only be accurate to the extent that the proxy groups have the same characteristics as DWA cases, which is unlikely to hold in reality. Estimates should be treated with caution.

3. Estimated expenditure is rounded to the nearest £1 million, with caseloads to the nearest 1,000.

4. The figures should be treated only as broad estimates and not as actual.

Derelict Property, Romford Road

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans his Department has for the future use of the derelict property it formerly occupied at 544 Romford road, London E12. [3280]

Mr. Roger Evans: None, as the Department's lease on the property expired in 1991.

Pension Liabilities

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when, and in what form, he proposes to reply to the first report of the Social Security Select Committee, HC23, Session 1996–97, on unfunded pension liabilities in the EU. [3529]

Mr. Lilley: We propose to respond in the usual way within the normal period of three months of the original publication date.

Benefits Agency (Emergency Payments)

Mr. Redmond: To asked the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the work load of the out-of-hours emergency payments service of the Benefits Agency area directorate covering *(a)* the Yorkshire and Humberside area *(b)* Doncaster and *(c)* Mexborough for the financial years (i) 1995–96 and (ii) 1996–97 to date. [2718]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 11 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will make a statement about the workload of the out of hours emergency payments service of the Benefits Agency Area Directorate covering (a) the Yorkshire and Humberside Area (b) Doncaster and (c) Mexborough for financial years (i) 1995–96 and (ii) 1996–97 to date.

Information is not available in the format requested. Statistics are collated at Area Directorate level and not by office. From April 1996, the two area Directorates of "South Yorkshire and Humberside" (which included Doncaster and Mexborough) and "North and West Yorkshire" merged to form Yorkshire Area Directorate (AD).

I have provided the number of referrals to the Out of Hours Service (OOHS) for the year April 1995 to March 1996 and the latest collated figures for Yorkshire AD for the period 1 April 1996 and 13 October 1996.

It should be noted that a referral means any contact by a customer or third party. Approximately 50% of the referrals require a visit by Benefits Agency staff.

Referrals to OOHS

1995–96	
South Yorkshire and Humberside	1,878
North and West Yorkshire	2,533
1 April 1996 to 13 October 1996	
Yorkshire	2,183

These figures are provisional and subject to change. I hope you find this reply helpful.

Peter Sutton

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if all the benefit claimants affected by computer error referred to in his Department's response of 12 August to correspondence on behalf of Peter Sutton have been contacted and, where applicable, reimbursed and compensated for the error; and what was the total value of both *(a)* arrears of benefit and *(b)* compensation paid. [3107]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is an operational matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 11 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if all the benefit claimants affected by computer error referred to in his Department's response of 12th August to correspondence on behalf of Peter Sutton have been contacted and, where applicable, reimbursed and compensated for the error; and what was the total value of both arrears of benefit and compensation paid.

The exercise to contact the 12,325 benefit customers affected by the computer fault is continuing. I can confirm that 2088 awards have been revised from the statistics received so far from Benefit Agency Offices. The information requested is not available as the statistics relate specifically to the number of cases where all action has been completed and not to the number of customers contacted. Full details of the current information received are in the following table:

	Total number of cases identified	Number revised	Amount underpaid £000	Number of compensation claims	Number of compensation claims so far awarded	Amount of compensation paid £000
Retirement pension and widows' benefit	6,742	1,392	821	1,039	336	24
Invalidity benefit	5,583	696	133	156	41	2.7

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

Compensation will be payable in any case where the benefit arrears amount to over £50, the amount of compensation exceeds £5 and the delay in payment is more than eight months (retirement pension) or seven months (widows' benefit and invalidity benefit) from the date of entitlement to the revised rate of benefit.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Benefits Agency (Public Caller Offices)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many Benefits Agency public caller offices are scheduled to *(a)* close and *(b)* have their opening hours reduced in order to reduce administrative costs in the three years to March 1999. [2118]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 11 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State how many Benefits Agency (BA) public caller offices are scheduled to *(a)* close and *(b)* have their opening hours reduced in order to reduce administrative costs in the three years to March 1999.

In the period April to October 1996 16 BA public caller offices were closed and 2 had their opening hours reduced. From November 1996 to March 1999, 17 BA public caller offices are currently scheduled to close and 3 are currently scheduled to have their opening hours reduced.

Consultation with customers and customers' representatives always takes place before the closure of any BA public caller office.

We are directing our resources to where they are needed most, and BA District Managers, using their local knowledge, will continue to review, on an on-going basis, the service they provide to maximise service to the public and provide value for money to the tax payer. Since the advent of Job Seekers' Allowance, unemployed customers also have access to enquiry facilities sited in over 1000 Employment Services Job Centres.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

WALES

BSE (Compensation)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage and total amount of BSE eradication and compensation scheme expenditure has been received by *(a)* farmers, *(b)* slaughterers, *(c)* renderers and *(d)* other recipients; and if he will make a statement. [2162]

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 6 November 1996]:* Between April and the end of October 1996, the total UK expenditure on BSE eradication and compensation schemes broken down by recipients was as follows:

	£ million	Per cent.
(a) Farmers	477	68
(b) Slaughterers	97	14
(c) Renderers	78	11
(d) Other recipients	48	7
	700	

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the total expenditure to date on the BSE eradication and compensation schemes; and if he will make a statement. [2166]

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 6 November 1996]:* The total UK expenditure to date is £700 million. Most of this expenditure has been on the over-30-month slaughter scheme, the calf processing scheme, the additional EU compensation package—beef special premium scheme and suckler cow premuim scheme top-up,beef marketing payment scheme—the beef stocks transfer scheme, the animal feed recall scheme, aid to renderers, emergency aid to the slaughtering sector.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the methods by which compensation has been directed to farmers in Wales since the onset of the BSE crisis, *(b)* the level of expenditure in Wales under each of these headings and *(c)* the amount of each expenditure item in Wales that is recoverable from the European Union. [3393]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 24 July 1996, *Official Report,* columns *532–33.* Subsequent to that reply, additional expenditure has been agreed as follows:

> Approximately £160 million from EU funds for direct support to UK beef producers. Over £100 million—of this, £10.46 million in Wales—has already been disbursed through supplementary payments to the beef special premium and suckler cow premium schemes and through the beef marketing payments scheme.
>
> Some £89 million from national funds for direct support to UK beef producers. £60 million of this sum has been earmarked for distribution to eligible cattle producers under the 1997 hill livestock compensatory allowance scheme.
>
> £16.6 million for extra cold storage capacity to help reduce the backlog of animals awaiting slaughter under the over-30-month scheme.

Disaggregated levels of expenditure for Wales are not held by the Intervention Board executive agency which is responsible for running the majority of BSE-related schemes in the UK. A detailed breakdown of the latest BSE expenditure forecasts will be given in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's forthcoming Budget statement.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many applications for fundholding status he is considering from general practitioners in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [2267]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Applications from 25 practices have been accepted and they are now preparing to start fundholding from next April.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of the population within each health district are presently covered by general practitioner fundholding practices. [3187]

Mr. Jones: The latest available figures are given in the following table.

Health authority area	*Percentage of people registered with a doctor who are covered by a fundholding practice*
Bro Taf	42
Dyfed Powys	73
Gwent	50
Morgannwg	56
North Wales	44
Wales	52

Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many cases of MRSA have been recorded in the Royal Gwent hospital in each of the last five years broken down by age bands of 10 years; and if he will make a statement; [2899]

(2) how many *(a)* cases and *(b)* deaths from MRSA have been recorded in Wales in each of the last five years broken down in each case by age bands of 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [2888]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There were two, two and 53 cases of MRSA recorded by the Royal Gwent laboratory in 1994, 1995 and 1996—up to 22 July—respectively. No breakdown of these data by age band is available centrally. Information relating to Wales is given in the following table.

Laboratory confirmed cases of MRSA in Wales

Age group	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*[1]
Under 1	2	3	8
1 to 4	1	3	7
5 to 14	—	3	10
15 to 24	16	13	51
25 to 34	17	24	88
35 to 44	21	17	85
45 to 54	23	29	99
55 to 64	26	33	157
65 and over	251	270	1,265
Not known	184	47	330
Total	541	442	2,100

Source:
CDSC Welsh unit MRSA surveillance programme in Wales.
Notes:
Completeness of reporting by laboratories is variable. Increased emphasis was placed on reporting in 1996 and additional features requested. Data may include some GP referrals. The numbers indicated are patients identified with MRSA, only a proportion of these will have clinical illness—estimated at 50 per cent.—due to MRSA infection, the remainders will be carriers of the organism.
[1] To 4 November.

Figures for the number of deaths are not currently available. Work being undertaken by the Office for National Statistics may provide some data in due course.

Prescribed Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the average *(a)* number of types and *(b)* quantity of preparations taken by people in Wales in each of the last five years broken down by *(a)* gender and *(b)* age bands of 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [2884]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No estimate has been made.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many submissions he has received *(a)* in favour and *(b)* opposed to nursery school vouchers in the last two years. [3224]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Government's intention of increasing provision for four-year-olds has been welcomed. Submissions in favour of a voucher scheme as a means of giving effect to those proposals have not been solicited, although there has been one specific letter of support. In addition to ministerial correspondence, the Welsh Office has received some 4,500 letters and almost 60 petitions in opposition to the scheme. The large amount of correspondence against the scheme is not surprising as it is clear from the letters that there have been many misunderstandings and much misinformation.

Crown Estate

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of the land in Wales is owned by the Crown Estate; and what environmental regulations apply to this land. [3283]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Crown Estate in Wales extends to 67,466 acres, of which 63,509 acres are subject to commoners rights.

Environmental regulations covering this land will depend upon its designation.

Secondees and Consultants

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* secondees and *(b)* consultants are working for his Department on (i) private finance initiative and (ii) other issues; and at what cost to public funds in (1) the current financial year and (2) 1997–98. [3673]

Mr. Hague: Thirteen people are currently on secondment to my Department, at a total cost in 1996–97 of £351,500. One is working on the private finance initiative. My Department plans to spend around £880,000 on external consultants in 1996–97, including £130,000 on PFI-related work. Plans for expenditure on inward secondments and external consultancy in 1997–98 have not yet been decided.

Gwent Health Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Gwent health authority concerning a recent dispute relating to the appointment of a senior manager; [3674]

(2) what requests he has received from the chairman of the Gwent health authority for approval of an ex gratia severance payment to a senior manager appointed in January 1996; and if he will make a statement. [3675]

Mr. Hague: I wrote to the chairman after I received a copy of the report of the inquiry into the appointment. No proposal to make a severance payment has been received.

University Hospital of Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what secondment he has given to the former chief nurse of the university hospital of Wales; and if he will make a statement on the financial arrangements. [3676]

Mr. Hague: The former chief nurse is working on a collaborative project managed by the trust, college of medicine and my Department on the developing role of the clinical nurse. It fulfils part of the remit of the task force on continuing education and practice chaired by the chief nursing officer. Costs are shared by the participants, with the trust paying for her salary until 31 May 1997.

South and East Wales Ambulance NHS Trust

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 1 November, *Official Report*, column *295*, if he will arrange for a copy of the district auditor's report into the accounts of the South and East Wales Ambulance NHS trust to be placed in the Library. [3671]

Mr. Hague: Yes. A copy is now available in the Library of the House.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 13 November 1996

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

EU Research and Development Programme

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Government have made to the European Commission concerning integration of applied research funded under the fifth framework programme and national research initiatives. [3167]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

The UK set out its view on the relationship of EU and nationally funded research programmes in its position paper on the fifth framework programme for research and technological development, submitted to the European Commission in June 1996. This is available on the Internet at http://www.open.gov.uk/ost/osthome.html.

Mrs. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Government have made to the European Commission as regards the priority accorded to basic research in the fifth framework programme. [3165]

Mr. Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

The UK set out its view on the place of basic research in the EU's fifth framework programme for research and technological development in its position paper submitted to the European Commission in June 1996. This can be found on the Internet at http://www.open.gov.uk/ost/osthome.html.

Mrs. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Government have made to the EU on the levels of funding available for social sciences and humanities under the fifth framework programme. [3166]

Mr. Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

None. At this early stage in the negotiations for the EU's fifth framework programme for research and technological development, it is premature to make representations on levels of funding for specific parts of the programme.

Mrs. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps have been taken to ensure that the quality of research funded by the fifth framework programme is of a similar standard to that funded in the United Kingdom. [3164]

Mr. Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

The UK attaches great importance to research funded by the EU's framework programmes for research and technological development being of the highest quality. In the negotiations on the EU's fifth framework programme the UK will press for scientific excellence to remain the primary criterion for selecting projects for support.

Mrs. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the Government are taking in respect of the indirect costs of European research programmes to enable universities to participate actively in the fifth framework programme. [3168]

Mr. Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

None. It is for individual institutions to decide whether to bid for EU framework programme funds on the basis of the EU's conditions of funding.

Anglo-French Summit

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had on the furtherance of nuclear co-operation with France at the Anglo-French summit in Bordeaux. [3618]

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, together with our French counterparts, reviewed the work of the Franco-British Joint Nuclear Commission.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary for State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had with the United States Government before the Anglo-French summit on the matters to be discussed there. [3565]

Mr. Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary had no specific discussions with the United States Government prior to the UK-French summit on matters to be discussed there.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list *(a)* the members of his Department who attended the Anglo-French summit in Bordeaux and *(b)* the positions they hold. [3619]

Mr. Davis: The following members of this Department accompanied me to the UK French summit in Bordeaux:

London delegation

Mr. W. G. Ehrman: principle private secretary

Mr. J. Macadie: Private secretary, Minister of State

Ms E. R. Rea: Personal assistant

Mr. P. Lever: Director for EU and economic affairs and deputy under-secretary of state

Mr. J. Greenstock: Political director and deputy under-secretary of state

Mr. N. Sheinwald: Head of news department

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which representatives of the United States Government attended the Anglo-French summit as observers. [3564]

Mr. Davis: No representatives of the United States Government attended the UK-French summit as observers.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place copies of all agreements reached between Britain and

France and all communiqués issued during the Anglo–French summit in Bordeaux in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [3603]

Mr. Davis: One joint agreement was signed at the summit, a UK–French naval letter of intent; and one joint statement was issued, on Zaire. A copy of each will be deposited in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had on the memorandum of agreement on co–operation concerning nuclear safety and security which the United States of America signed with France on 4 June at the Anglo–French summit in Bordeaux [3617]

Mr. Soames: I have been asked to reply.

We have had no such discussions.

China

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Chinese Government regarding the detention of Mr. Ngawang Choephel; and if he will make a statement. [3659]

Mr. Hanley: A great many cases, such as those of Ngawang Choephel, are brought to our attention. We continue to be concerned about such cases, and regularly express our views about the human rights situation in Tibet to the Chinese authorities. I did so most recently when I met the Chinese Vice Premier Li Lanqing in London on 5 November.

Pakistan

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the advice given by his Department to the Home Office about political freedom in Pakistan following the recent decision by the President of that country to dismiss the Government. [3559]

Dr. Liam Fox: We are continuing to monitor closely the situation in Pakistan in conjunction with the Home Office. It is important that the elections called for 3 February are free and fair.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the report of the United Nations special rapporteur on human rights in Pakistan; and if he will list the steps taken by his Government to ensure that the special rapporteur's recommendations are implemented. [3560]

Dr. Fox: The Special Rapporteur on Torture has reported instances of serious human rights abuses in Pakistan. We expect such allegations to be fully investigated. We have regularly raised human rights issues with Pakistan, most recently when I met the Human Rights Minister in Islamabad in October, and will continue to do so.

Chernobyl

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response Her Majesty's Government have made to the findings of the Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 1995, regarding the health, social and economic conditions of areas in Belarus, Ukraine, and the southern Russian Federation which were worst affected by the Chernobyl disaster; and if he will make a statement. [3696]

Dr. Liam Fox: The Secretary-General's report on the Chernobyl accident, presented to the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 1995, was studied with great interest by those UK Government Departments and agencies concerned. It was a valuable contribution to international understanding of the problems arising from the accident. The main emphasis of the UK's aid policy in relation to the affected areas of Belarus, Ukraine and in Russia has been to deliver assistance through international agencies, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency, the World Health Organisation and the European Union. We believe such agencies are best placed to co-ordinate and prioritise the work that needs to be done.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what initiatives Her Majesty's Government *(a)* have taken and *(b)* plan to take in 1996 to provide bilateral aid to the Governments of Ukraine and Belarus for the purposes of alleviating the social, health, economic and environmental effects of the Chernobyl disaster; and if he will make a statement. [3697]

Dr. Fox: Since 1986, UK bilateral assistance has included £6.1 million from the UK's know-how fund for energy sector reform measures in Ukraine, and we have funded land remediation feasibility studies in the region via the environmental know-how fund. But most of the UK's assistance is channelled through joint programmes managed with our G7 and EU partners. So far, we have contributed £18.25 million to the international nuclear safety account, of which £10 million has been earmarked for Chernobyl-related projects. The Department of Health is supporting international activities to deal with health effects from Chernobyl and is directly supporting research on the incidence of childhood thyroid cancer. This year we have supported work on radioactive food screening and soil decontamination.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution the Government have made to the United Nations trust fund for the relief of Chernobyl victims. [3698]

Dr. Fox: Her Majesty's Government have contributed £25,000 to the United Nations trust fund for the relief of Chernobyl victims.

ENVIRONMENT

Renewable Energy

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans his Department has to revise planning policy guidance note No. 22 on renewable energy to give greater encouragement to autonomous local services and associated industries; and if he will make a statement. [3435]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Government have no immediate plans to revise planning policy guidance note No. 22, "Renewable Energy".

Regeneration Assistance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance his Department provides to *(a)* the Prince's Trust and *(b)* Business in the Community. [3431]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department assists these organisations in a number of ways and greatly values the contribution that they make to strengthen communities and promoting regeneration. We are currently assisting the Prince's Trust through the free secondment of two members of staff, one to the headquarters office of the Prince's Trust volunteers and another to the Prince of Wales business leaders forum. We liaise with Business in the Community on various matters of common interest and provide grants towards some of its regeneration and environmental work, the total for the current financial year being about £120,000. My Department worked in partnership with Business in the Community and others to set up the local investment fund, which has already provided over £½ million in loans for voluntary sector projects in deprived areas.

Preston Farm, Stockton on Tees

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people are employed on Teesside development corporation's Preston Farm site in Stockton on Tees. [3880]

Sir Paul Beresford: It is estimated that 3,400 people now work on the Preston Farm site.

Green Ministers

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when was the last meeting of the green Ministers; who attended; and what issues were discussed. [3867]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Member to the Department's news release No. 480, issued earlier today.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Pension Scheme

Mr. Denham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many requests for information the principal civil service pension scheme has received from pension providers undertaking reviews of pension transfers and opt-outs; in how many cases all appropriate information has been supplied; what is the average length of time taken to supply such information; and what moratorium has been introduced on supplying such information. [3340]

Mr. Freeman: The administration of the principal civil service pension scheme is carried out by employing Departments and the information requested is not held centrally. Administrators have been provided with information packs on the PCSPS, and use these, together with a standard questionnaire on members' benefits, to help them handle requests from pension providers consistently and efficiently. The recent introduction of powers to recharge administrative costs should assist further with the processing of such requests although we believe that relatively few civil servants are affected by the personal pensions review.

Central Intelligence Machinery

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to revise the booklet published in 1993 on the Cabinet Office's central intelligence machinery. [4256]

Mr. Freeman: A revised edition of the booklet is to be published today and copies are being placed in the Libraries of both Houses. It is being launched simultaneously on the Internet.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Zaire and Rwanda

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the British Government *(a)* are taking and *(b)* plan to take, within the EU and with their UN partners, (i) to support the ceasefire in eastern Zaire, (ii) to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches the refugee population in eastern Zaire and (iii) to promote a regional solution to the problems of the Great Lakes region. [3678]

Dr. Liam Fox: UN Security Council resolution 1078 of 9 November calls for an immediate ceasefire and complete cessation of all hostilities in the region. We continue to urge all parties to observe a ceasefire, which will be vital for humanitarian aid to reach those in need. We are in close touch with UN agencies and non-governmental organisations, many of them British, which have undertaken missions into eastern Zaire to assess humanitarian needs and means of delivery. We stand ready to provide further assistance. An EU ministerial troika is also in the region to assess what contribution the EU can make. We strongly support the efforts of the EU and UN special envoys to promote a regional solution to the problems facing the Great Lakes, and welcome the constructive engagement of regional leaders in that process.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response the British Government have made to proposals to send a multinational force to Zaire; and what logistical and financial support the Government have offered in respect of such a force. [3679]

Dr. Fox: We supported United Nations Security Council resolution 1078 authorising member states to begin preparations for a multinational force and are working closely with our partners in considering the options for a possible UK contribution.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the British Government are taking to promote the holding of a regional conference on the political problems of the Great Lakes region. [3677]

Dr. Fox: We fully support the convening, under UN and Organisation of African Unity auspices, of an international conference on peace, security and development in the Great Lakes region. We are working

to promote the support of countries within the region, as well as of the wider international community, for urgent action to make all the necessary arrangements for such a conference.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the recent declaration of a ceasefire by the Tutsi rebels in eastern Zaire; and if he will make a statement. [3680]

Dr. Fox: We welcome the declaration of a ceasefire on 5 November by Banyamulenge leaders. We continue to urge all parties to the conflict in eastern Zaire to declare a complete cessation of violence.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the current total of unclaimed prizes from the national lottery; how much interest has been earned by this sum; and where each sum is retained and by whom. [3279]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This is an operational matter for Camelot Group plc. I have, therefore, asked the Director General of the Office of the National Lottery, who is responsible for regulating the operation of the lottery, to write to the right hon. Member, placing copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

DEFENCE

Environmental Assessment

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what environmental assessment in respect of contaminated land has been conducted at *(a)* the chemical defence establishment at Nancekuke in Cornwall, *(b)* the central dockyard laboratory at HM naval base, Portsmouth and *(c)* the RAF aeroplane and armaments experimental establishment at Boscombe Down; [3526]

(2) what environmental impact assessment has been conducted in respect of contaminated land at *(a)* the Admiralty engineering laboratories at (i) Ditton Park and (ii) West Drayton *(b)* the Admiralty experimental works at Haslar, Gosport, *(c)* the Admiralty marine engineering establishment at Portland, *(d)* the Admiralty materials laboratory at Holton Heath, Poole, *(e)* the Admiralty research laboratories at (i) Perran Porth, Cornwall, (ii) Teddington and (iii) Bushy Park, *(f)* the Admiralty surface weapons establishments at (i) Ditton Park, (ii) Eastney Portsmouth, (iii) Funtingdon, (iv) London road, Portsmouth, and (v) Portsmouth, Cosham and *(g)* the Admiralty underwater weapons establishments. [3413]

Mr. Soames: My Department has carried out environmental assessments as appropriate at its sites. As I informed the hon. Member on 15 October, *Official Report*, column *861*, we are introducing a prioritised procedure of land quality assessment for the defence estate, which will provide a publicly available land quality statement for individual sites. However, such documents do not yet exist in respect of these sites, and historic details are not held centrally on work carried out in the past.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ask his United States counterpart to provide routinely to his Department copies of the environmental compliance assessment and management programme reports for each military facility in the United Kingdom and overseas territories where operating rights have been granted to United States defence forces. [3414]

Mr. Soames: MOD personnel are already fully involved in the environmental audit process at US military facilities in the UK and are routinely made aware of the contents of environmental compliance assessment and management programme reports. Similarly FCO personnel are kept fully informed of the environmental impact of all US activities at overseas territories where operating rights have been granted to US forces.

Nuclear Co-operation (France)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions were held on co-ordinating the patrols of Trident and the French Triomphant submarines at the Anglo-French summit in Bordeaux. [3616]

Mr. Soames: No such discussions were held.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of occasions in the last four years that members of the French armed forces have visited the United Kingdom to discuss the furtherance of nuclear co-operation. [3604]

Mr. Soames: Members of the French armed forces regularly visit the United Kingdom to discuss matters related to defence nuclear co-operation.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the number of occasions in the last four years that representatives or contractors of the Delegation Generale pour l'Armement, and the Commissariat a l'Energie Atomique have visited the atomic weapons establishments at Aldermaston, Burghfield, Cardiff and Foulness; [3606]

(2) if he will list the number of occasions in the last four years that representatives or contractors of the Delegation Generale pour l'Armement, and the Commissariat a l'Energie Atomique have visited the United Kingdom to discuss the furtherance of nuclear co-operation. [3605]

Mr. Soames: There have been 28 visits by representatives or contractors of the DGA and CEA to UK atomic weapon establishments in the period. There have also been four visits by French officials to the UK for discussions on nuclear technical and scientific matters.

Armed Forces (Beef)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 31 October, *Official Report*, column *195*, for what reasons British frozen beef is not readily available for use by the armed forces. [3821]

Mr. Arbuthnot: For commercial reasons the British market deals predominantly in fresh beef.

SCOTLAND

Ministerial Visit

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the purpose of the visit by the Under-Secretary of State, the Earl of Lindsay, to Middleshot square, Prestonpans, on 6 November. [3411]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* My noble Friend visited Prestonpans on 6 November to see at first hand the damage to the homes in Middleshot square and the efforts of the local authority and emergency services in dealing with the situation. He also took the opportunity to visit Preston Lodge school, where the local authority had provided rest centre facilities for the families who had been evacuated from their homes.

Earth Tremors (Musselburgh)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many earth tremors have been recorded in the Musselburgh area in recent weeks; what was the magnitude of the tremors; and if he will make a statement on possible connections with current and historic coal mining operations in the neighbourhood. [3086]

Mr. Kynoch: The British Geological Survey reported on 6 November that 79 tremors have been detected in the Musselburgh area; 19 of which have been recorded as being felt by residents. The tremors have been of varying magnitude; the largest, with a magnitude of 2 on the Richter scale, was recorded on 25 October. Precise records of old workings in the area do not exist. It is difficult therefore to determine precisely the relationship between the tremors and previous and current mining operations. However, in the 25 years of the British Geological Survey's seismic monitoring programme, there have been no reports of structural damage or injuries caused by mining-induced earthquakes.

Research and Development

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those companies which have established plants in Scotland in each of the past 10 years which have created research and development centres within those plants. [3210]

Mr. Kynoch: Information is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Child Witnesses

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many cases at *(a)* the High Court and *(b)* the sheriff court have been abandoned because of the inability of child witnesses to give evidence in each of the past four years; and if he will make a statement; [3211]

(2) in respect of how many cases at *(a)* the High Court and *(b)* the sheriff court closed circuit television has been employed in the examination of child witnesses in each of the past four years; [3212]

(3) if he will list the courts which *(a)* currently have closed circuit television and *(b)* are to have such equipment installed within the next two years; and if he will make a statement. [3213]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Statistics regarding the abandonment of such cases are not available, but indications are that the numbers are not substantial. A range of measures contribute to this. To assist those children whom it is anticipated may have difficulty giving evidence in a conventional court setting, applications may be made before the trial for the use of screens, closed circuit television or evidence on commission. Since 1 April 1996, prior statements of witnesses, including children, may be admissible in terms of the new exceptions to the hearsay rule contained in sections 259 to 262 of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995. There have been a number of instances where prosecutors have had recourse to these provisions, which allow for the introduction of prior statements by a child, providing at the time a statement was made, the child would have been a competent witness.

CCTV has been employed in the examination of child witnesses on the following occasions:

Year	*Sheriff Court cases*	*High Court cases*
1993	2	5
1994	6	5
1995	6	5
1996 (to 30 September)	0	6

CCTV equipment is available in the High Court in Edinburgh and in each sheriffdom. It can be made available for all High Court sittings at which it is required. For the sheriff courts, equipment is based at Edinburgh, Glasgow, Greenock, Aberdeen, Airdrie and Falkirk sheriff courts. Installation of CCTV equipment is included in the plans for the refurbishment of the High Court buildings in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Extra-contractual Referrals

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to simplify the procedure for extra-contractual referrals; and when he plans to implement them. [3518]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Measures to simplify the procedures for extra-contractual referrals were introduced on 1 October 1996. From that date, it is no longer necessary for NHS trusts to notify purchasers in advance of emergency and tertiary extra-contractual referrals, unless a patient's stay is expected to exceed 28 days or where the costs are likely to be in excess of £6,000. Similar procedures have been introduced in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We will consult the health service in Scotland about any future proposals further to simplify the procedure for extra-contractual referrals.

TREASURY

Cross-channel Shopping

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the loss of *(a)* excise and *(b)* VAT revenue during the last 12 months due to consumers crossing the English channel to avoid United Kingdom taxation on (i) alcohol, (ii) cigarettes and tobacco and (iii) perfumes; what is the equivalent figure for the previous 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [2787]

Mr. Oppenheim: Customs' latest estimate of excise duty and VAT revenues lost from legitimate personal importation of duty-paid alcohol and tobacco products is for the calendar year 1995, and is given in the table. Equivalent figures for calendar year 1994 are given in brackets.

Revenue losses from cross-border shopping

£ million

Product type	*Excise duty*	*VAT*	*Total revenue*
Alcohol products	145 (145)	65 (60)	210 (205)
Tobacco products	65 (55)	15 (15)	80 (70)
Total	210 (200)	80 (75)	290 (275)

Figures have been independently rounded to £5 million. Figures assume that 50 per cent. of alcohol purchased is additional consumption.

Customs' estimate of revenue evasion through smuggling of alcohol and tobacco products, excluding any losses from commercial fraud, is set out in the table. The actual loss to the Exchequer will be less than the amount of revenue evaded, as some smuggling is likely to represent additional consumption, rather than substituting for similar goods bought in the UK. There was no previous official estimate of revenue evaded through smuggling.

Revenue evaded through smuggling

£ million

Product type	*Excise duty*	*VAT*	*Total revenue*
Alcohol products	145	65	210
Tobacco products	445	115	560
Total	590	180	770

Figures have been independently rounded to £5 million.

There is no official estimate of revenue losses from cross-border shopping in perfumes.

Opticians (VAT)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total cost of repayments of VAT to opticians; what rebates remained unpaid after the cut off date; what representations he has received on this matter; and what action he proposes to take as a result. [3035]

Mr. Oppenheim: VAT refunds totalling about £200 million have been made to opticians. Customs and Excise does not have information on how many opticians had not made claims by 18 July, and does not hold figures centrally of those who have not received a full refund. Following the Government's announcement on 18 July, and the subsequent exposure of the related draft Finance Bill clauses, a number of representations on various aspects of the proposed changes have been received. They are being considered along with all other representations.

NHS Trusts (VAT)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Secretary of State for Health and *(b)* NHS trusts regarding the three year limit for refund claims for VAT payments by NHS trusts; and if he will make a statement. [3240]

Mr. Oppenheim: None. Where trusts incur VAT on contracted-out services relating to their non-business activities, they should not normally need to make retrospective claims for VAT. Under the special arrangements for contracted out services, refunds can be claimed on a current, monthly basis and there is some flexibility at the end of each financial year.

Personal Pensions

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made in the reviews of personal pensions cases referred to in the guidelines issued by the Securities and Investments Board in 1994. [4278]

Mrs. Angela Knight: SIB's guidance to regulators recognised under the Financial Services Act 1986 called for a substantial programme of case reviews to establish whether people who had transferred out of occupational schemes, or opted out of them, or had never joined them, in order to hold a personal pension had done so as a result of mis-selling. Where mis-selling was found to lead to financial loss for investors, SIB has looked to the investment firms responsible to provide redress either by reinstating the investor into the occupational scheme—where this was possible—or by topping up the investor's personal pension.

This review process has proved extraordinarily difficult for all concerned. It has required regulators and investment firms to devote substantial resources to the casework. There have been a number of reasons why progress has been slower than the regulators had expected, some of them arising from factors beyond the control of the firms responsible for carrying out case reviews. However, regrettably there are some investment firms which have made less effort than others to carry out the required casework.

Even when the firms concerned are anxious to bring cases to a speedy conclusion, it has often proved difficult to do so because of the volume and complexity of the information required to evaluate each case in full. For whatever reason they arise, delays are a matter of concern.

In order to speed up progress with reviews, SIB has today issued a statement setting out a streamlined approach to evaluation of scheme benefits for computation of loss or redress. It involves using a simplified model which is designed both to reduce significantly the burden on occupational schemes and to enable firms to reach reliable conclusions by using information which is generally available about the terms of the relevant occupational scheme(s) together with standard or approximate data for missing items. By using this approach, it should be possible for investment firms to conclude case reviews more quickly and thus put matters right for investors more quickly too. Where

standard or approximate data are used for important items, investors will be informed and have the opportunity to provide detailed data.

The Government welcome this initiative. SIB's model should provide robust results with less administrative input. It means investors who might otherwise have been members of occupational schemes should get their cases sorted out more quickly while investment firms should need to divert resources into this important task for a shorter period. It will also require less input from occupational schemes, which can experience difficulties in providing non-pension information about former members.

The pensions industry must make haste to complete their case reviews, in the interests not only of the financial position of the investors concerned but of restoring the industry's reputation. I also trust that occupational schemes will co-operate in providing information to investment firms and in providing reinstatement for current employees.

For the public service pension schemes, the basic information required is already fully available. Steps have also been taken to ensure that these schemes stand ready to reinstate current employees into the relevant schemes for both future and past service.

At this state, it is not clear how fast cases can now be progressed. Investment firms have much relevant information already and may be able to complete these cases quickly now. SIB now expects the front-line regulators to assess what can be achieved by their members using the new guidance, and then to set and monitor realistic but appropriately challenging targets for completing the review process.

Investment firms have a clear responsibility to give priority to this important task. Their good names and the prospects of the industry depend upon it. I therefore welcome SIB's warning that firms failing to carry out their responsibilities must expect disciplinary action from their regulators. I very much hope that further disciplinary action will not be necessary and that the pensions industry will now move swiftly to put this unfortunate episode behind it.

Earnings

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will show the number and proportion of manual, non-manual, and all part-time employees on adult rates earning less than *(a)* £4.42, *(b)* £5.89 and *(c)* £6.31 per hour excluding overtime payments for (i) women, (ii) men and (iii) both sexes by standard economic region for Great Britain as a whole and for (1) each county and unitary authority in England, (2) each unitary authority in Wales, (3) each London borough and Greater London as a whole, (4) each unitary authority in Scotland, (5) Great Britain as a whole and (6) England as a whole for April 1996; [518]

(2) if he will show the number of and proportion of manual, non-manual and all full-time employees on adult rates earning less than *(a)* £167.45, *(b)* £223.27 and *(c)* £239.16 per week excluding overtime payments for (i) women, (ii) men and (iii) both sexes by standard economic region for Great Britain as a whole and for (1) each county and unitary authority in England, (2) each unitary authority in Wales, (3) each London borough and Greater London as a whole, (4) each unitary authority in Scotland, (5) Great Britain as a whole and (6) England as a whole for April 1996. [517]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answers 30 October 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. P. G. Pepper to Mr Peter Hain dated 13 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked the Director of the Office for National Statistics to reply to your recent questions asking for various figures on the number of and proportion of manual, non-manual part-time and full-time employees on adult rates of pay per hour and per week.

The director has asked me to respond in his absence.

The latest information from the New Earnings Survey, April 1996, is contained in the enclosed tables. I will also arrange for a copy of this letter and the tables to be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Taxpayer Records

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchquer (1) how security clearance is obtained for all personnel handling classified information at Oracle facilities abroad; [1076]

(2) if he will specify the arrangements made for the prosecution of offences under section 182 of the Finance Act 1989 by persons working at Oracle facilities abroad; [1078]

(3) if he will publish the undertaking which persons working at Oracle facilities abroad are required to sign in relation to taxpayer information; what are the terms of the oral declaration which persons working at Oracle facilities abroad are required to make and what are the circumstances in which it is required to be given, and the person to whom it is to be given; what are the arrangements made for ensuring compliance with these obligations at Oracle facilities abroad; and if he will specify the actions that would be taken against a person working at an Oracle facility abroad for breach of such obligations, or any other confidentiality obligation imposed by UK law; [1075]

(4) how Oracle ensures that persons at Oracle facilities abroad are made aware of their obligations under section 182 of the Finance Act 1989. [1077]

(5) if he will specify such other arrangements as may be made by the Commissioners of Inland Revenue in carrying out their functions of care and management under section 1 of the Taxes and Management Act 1970 in respect of access to copies of batches of taxpayer records at Oracle facilities abroad. [1080]

Mr. Jack *[holding answers 30 October 1996]:* The Inland Revenue's contract with Electronic Data Service Ltd. and EDS's contract with Oracle have both been amended to enable specialist staff at Oracle facilities abroad, in exceptional circumstances, to have access to copies of subsets of taxpayer records in order to carry out either diagnostic and/or remedial work necessary to support the self-assessment computer system. These amendments ensure that such access is permitted only under the very strict security arrangements specified by

the Inland Revenue and that Oracle is fully accountable, through EDS, to the Inland Revenue if there are any breaches of confidentiality. All Oracle employees are required to sign an agreement which, among other provisions, commits them to protect any information belonging to the Inland Revenue. If these procedures were to be breached, the agreement provides for a range of sanctions, including summary dismissal. The sanctions and remedies afforded by the criminal or civil laws of the United States and Australia may also flow from any such breaches.

Inheritance Tax Exemption

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent local authorities are consulted prior to agreements being made to grant conditional exemption from inheritance tax on condition that reasonable public access is allowed over the site; if local authorities are required to consult interested parties over the proposals; and what restrictions are imposed upon local authorities preventing them from disclosing information on the proposals. [1626]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 5 November 1996]:* In considering claims for conditional exemption for land, the Inland Revenue seeks advice from the Government's heritage advisory agencies—for example, the Countryside Commission for scenic land in England. As well as considering the eligibility of the land, the advisory agencies discuss and negotiate with owners the steps needed to meet the undertakings required by the law about the maintenance and preservation of the land, and securing public access to it. As part of this process, the agencies consult local authorities and other interested parties as appropriate. In many cases the local authority is offered an agency agreement to monitor the owner's compliance with the undertakings.

When an advisory agency consults a local authority or other body, the normal rules on taxpayer confidentiality apply, and any information given in connection with a claim or designation for conditional exemption is therefore confidential.

Home Income Plans (Tax Relief)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many non-taxpayers are in receipt of tax relief for home income plans; and if he will indicate the distribution of tax relief paid out for home income plans by income group. [3320]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* I regret that reliable information is not available.

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has of the revenue which would be raised by restricting mortgage interest tax relief at source, for new mortgage payers only, to *(a)* 10 per cent. in 1997–98, *(b)* 5 per cent. in 1998–99 and *(c)* 0 per cent. in 1999–2000. [3405]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* The revenue yield in 1997–98 and future years would depend on future interest rates and the future distribution of the number and value of new mortgages.

Uncollected Tax

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of uncollected *(a)* income tax, *(b)* corporation tax, *(c)* value added tax and *(d)* other taxes in (i) 1991–92, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [3385]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* The information is given in the following table. In this question, "uncollected" has been taken to mean "uncollected and subsequently written off or remitted".

Inland Revenue collection accounts are drawn up each year to the end of October, and the table therefore shows the amounts as at the end of October 1991, October 1994 and October 1995 (the latest date for which figures are available). Customs and Excise accounts are drawn up for each calendar year.

Amount remitted/written off

£ million

Type of tax	*October 1991*	*October 1994*	*October 1995*
Income tax	524	853	593
Corporation tax	321	262	127
Other taxes	39	44	36
Value added tax	515	550	484
Customs and other duties	0.7	1.7	5.9

The boards of Inland Revenue and of Customs and Excise allow remissions of tax on a case-by-case basis as an aspect of their responsibilities for the care and management of the various taxes.

Sound management requires that tax which is not collected and which cannot practicably be collected—for example, because the taxpayer is insolvent or his whereabouts are unknown—should be written off.

Insolvencies, where the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise have very little control over the amount recoverable, account for the vast majority of tax written off.

Tax Allowances

Mr. Alison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost of allowing married couples to choose joint income tax assessment on the assumption *(a)* that each would retain their personal allowance, *(b)* that the 20 per cent. and 24 per cent. rate bands were doubled and *(c)* that the married couples allowance was not given. [2823]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:* The estimated full-year cost at 1996–97 income levels of allowing married couples to choose whether they are taxed under the current system of independent taxation or taxed under the proposed joint taxation regime is about £5 billion.

Building Societies

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will amend the building societies legislation in order to safeguard the interests of disabled people whose accounts are held by trustees in the context of bonus payments given by building societies at the time of flotation. [2744]

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he is taking to ensure that investors, with severe disabilities, whose account is managed by a third party, will benefit from payments consequent upon building societies converting to banks. [2699]

Mr. Angela Knight *[holding answers 7 November 1996]:* The existing law allows building societies to take account of the interests of underlying beneficiaries, including disabled investors and others in this position, but the final structure of any distribution is a matter for the society concerned, and it is for its members to decide whether they agree that distribution. I understand that the Building Societies Association has issued guidance to its members on future account opening and handling practice in advance of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 coming into force on 2 December.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) to what extent the membership and voting rights of the Governor of the Bank of England on the European Monetary Institute will be modified if the United Kingdom declares against proceding to the third stage of economic and monetary union; [51]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact on United Kingdom representation at the general council of the European central bank, referred to in article 45 of the statute of the European system of central banks, if the United Kingdom decides not to join the third stage of EMU. [8]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Governor of the Bank of England would retain his voting rights in the Council of the European Monetary Institute irrespective of whether the Government were to decide that the United Kingdom should participate in the third stage of economic and monetary union.

The governing council of the European central bank will be the main decision–making body of the ECB and will take decisions about the single monetary policy. Only governors from the central banks of countries participating in the single currency and members of the executive board of the ECB will be members of the governing council. Only nationals of those member states may be members of the executive board, including the president and vice–president of the ECB. In addition, the treaty provides for a general council of the ECB, which will have very limited responsibilities. The general council shall comprise the president and vice–president of the ECB and the governors of all member states' national central banks.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Dounreay Nuclear Power Station

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent safety and environment reviews have been conducted by *(a)* the Health and Safety Executive, *(b)* the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate and *(c)* the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency into nuclear-related operations at Dounreay. [2958]

Mr. Page: There have been no recent safety and environmental reviews, but Her Majesty's nuclear installations inspectorate, on behalf of the Health and Safety Executive, carries out regular inspections of nuclear safety related operations on the Dounreay site. SEPA also carries out regular inspections to ensure that conditions of the discharge authorisations are in compliance with the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 and these will be continuing.

Business Links

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in what form and on what scale his Department will continue to fund business links beyond their third year of operation. [3777]

Mr. Page: DTI funding for business links beyond their third year of operation is in the form of a grant to the relevant training and enterprise council for business link services.

The scale of funding for business links beyond their third year is currently being considered in the 1996 public expenditure survey.

Packaging

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the current situation in respect of the EC's proposals on packaging and packaging waste. [3655]

Mr. Page: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environmental published for consultation on 11 July 1996 the draft Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations, which propose to implement the provisions relating to the recovery and recycling targets contained in the EC directive on packaging and packaging waste, 94/62/EC. Responses received during the consultation period, which ended on 30 September, are now being considered. It is intended to implement certain other provisions in the directive by means of section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972, along with others relating to the identification and marking of packaging, when Commission decisions and a further Parliament and Council directive are adopted.

Minimum Wage (Hairdressing)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will re-introduce a minimum wage in occupations where the service provided is not traded internationally, with particular reference to hairdressing. [2081]

Mr. John M. Taylor: No. The Government have no intention of introducing minimum wage legislation. Statutory wage fixing would lead to increased costs and job losses in hairdressing as in any other industry.

Trade Deficit (Germany)

Mr. Renton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the trade deficit with the Federal Republic of Germany in *(a)* visibles and *(b)* invisibles for 1996; and what were the equivalent figures for (i) 1995 and (ii) 1994. [3868]

Mr. Lang: The UK current account balances with unified Germany, for 1994, 1995 and the first eight months of 1996, are given in the table.

£ million

	1994	*1995*	*1996 (January–August)*
Goods	–4,669	–5,960	–4,392
Services	+462	+638	n/a
Investment income	+46	+293	n/a
Transfers	+28	+35	n/a

Sources:

1. Geographic Analysis of the Current Account of the Balance of Payments, Economic Trends, October 1996, Office of National Statistics.
2. Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics, August 1996, Office for National Statistics.

Note:

n/a = not available.

Joint Equipment Initiative

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the eligibility criteria for the provision of funds for capital expenditure under the joint equipment initiative; and if he will make a statement. [3690]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The eligibility criteria can be found in the guidelines for the initiative, which were issued on 26 February 1996. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support has been provided to universities under the joint equipment initiative; what were the targets set for the initiative; and if he will make a statement. [3689]

Mr. Taylor: The awards to be made under the joint research equipment initiative have yet to be announced, so no figure is currently available for the support provided to universities under the initiative. The objectives of the scheme were as follows:

To enable high-quality research relevant to the foresight generic science and technology priorities to be conducted with the equipment;

To contribute more generally to the physical research infrastructure in higher education institutions;

To promote partnership between higher education institutions and external sponsors of research, such as industry/commerce, charities, Government Departments, agencies and NHS trusts;

To assist the funding councils, the Department of Education Northern Ireland and research councils in taking a strategic overview of the equipment needs of the UK higher education sector.

Research Councils Procurement Officer

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what annual savings targets have been set for the newly appointed central procurement officer for the research councils. [3691]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The procurement adviser has been set a number of key objectives for his first year, including an impact on the procurement bill. During the first three calendar months he will assess the current state of procurement practices and performance within the councils and on that basis will propose targets and define the parameters for savings taking account of both purchase price and where applicable life-cycle cost.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Female Detainees

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women were detained in prisons, under Immigration Act powers, at the end of *(a)* July, *(b)* August and *(c)* September; what were the nationalities of those detained; how many were deported; and in which prison establishments they were detained. [1043]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 13 November 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking, how many women were detained in prison, under Immigration Act powers, at the end of (a) July, (b) August and (c) September; what were the nationalities of those detained; how many were deported; and in which prison establishments they were detained.

The information requested on those detained is given in the attached table. Provisional information shows that between July and September 4 persons were recorded as being discharged for removal by the Immigration Service.

Population of female Immigration Act detainees[1] in prison service establishments in England and Wales on last day of month, July to September 1966; by nationality[2]

Nationality	*Number*
July 1996	
HMP Holloway	
Jamaica	6
Nigeria	5
Zimbabwe	2
Others	8
HMP Risley	
Other	2
Total	23
August 1996	
HMP Holloway	
Jamaica	4
Nigeria	5
Zimbabwe	3
Others	12
HMP Risley	
Other	1
HMP Styal	
Other	1
Total	26
September 1996	
HMP Holloway	
Jamaica	7
Nigeria	3
Zimbabwe	3
Other	9
HMP Risley	
Other	1
HMP Styal	
Other	1

Population of female Immigration Act detainees[1] in prison service establishments in England and Wales on last day of month, July to September 1966; by nationality[2]

Nationality	*Number*
HMP New Hall	
Other	1
Total	25

[1] Provisional figures.
[2] Nationalities with only one prisoner are included in "Other".

Prisoners (Drugs Tests)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the number of prisoners tested for drugs each month since March 1996, *(b)* the number of prisoners who have tested positive for each type of drug in each month since March 1996 and *(c)* the number of prisons testing for drugs each month since March 1996. [1499]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 13 November 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the numbers of prisoners tested for drugs, the number of prisons testing and the number of prisoners testing positive for each drug type since March 1996.

The attached table sets out the numbers tested and the numbers testing positive for each drug under all forms of Drug Strategy testing. These comprise the random, on suspicion, risk assessment, frequent testing and on reception types of mandatory drug test, and voluntary testing. Since forms of targeted testing of drug misusers are included in these figures and because multiple drug positives from a single sample have all been counted, these figures indicate higher levels of drug misuse than those for random mandatory drug testing previously published in Hansard. Since the end of March this year all prison establishments have been testing for drugs.

Mandatory and voluntary drug testing: numbers of prisoners tested and numbers positive for each drug group, March 1996 to September 1996

		Number positive for each drug						
Number tested	*Can*	*Opi*	*Ben*	*Coc*	*Amph*	*Meth*	*Bar*	*LSD*
March								
6,482	1,869	472	116	13	16	17	2	0
April								
6,419	1,488	483	140	17	15	24	2	0
May								
6,960	1,495	515	209	22	21	32	3	1
June								
6,777	1,384	517	189	25	12	23	4	0
July								
7,448	1,623	675	173	17	10	29	4	0
August								
6,596	1,404	534	143	32	15	19	1	0
September[1]								
6,743	1,413	570	143	21	17	33	4	1

[1] Figures for September are provisional.
Key:
Can = cannabis
Opi = opiates
Ben = benzodiazepines
Coc = cocaine
Amph = amphetamines
Meth = methadone
Bar = barbiturates
LSD = lysergic acid diethylamide

Prisoners (Earnings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the rules which govern the earnings of prisoners in United Kingdom prisons and the discretion given to individual prison governors. [1420]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter in so far as it relates to England and Wales has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given. The rules governing the earnings of prisoners in Scotland are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martyn Jones, dated 13 November 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the rules which govern the earnings of prisoners within the United Kingdom. The rules governing prisoners' earnings in Scotland are a matter for the Secretary of State for Scotland, so this reply only relates to England and Wales.

Under Rule 28(6) of the prison Rules 1964 (as amended) relating to England and Wales, prisoners may be paid for their work at rates approved by the Secretary of State, either generally or in relation to particular cases. The present Prison Service pay scheme for prisoners, introduced in 1992, is designed to encourage prisoners to engage in purposeful activity (work, education or other purposeful activity); to allow governors flexibility to use pay to meet their local priorities; and to ensure a reasonable degree of uniformity in rates of pay for similar work in different establishments.

Under the scheme prisoners willing to engage in purposeful activity but who cannot be offered a place receive a wage sufficient to meet their basic needs (the basic rate). Prisoners who engage in purposeful activity and perform to an acceptable level of quality and effort receive a higher wage designed to meet their reasonable needs and to provide a real incentive to engage in such activity (the employed rate). These two rates of pay are set nationally, and currently stand at £2.50 and £4 per week respectively.

In addition, governors may set rates of pay above these amounts for prisoners engaged in purposeful activity to acceptable levels of quality and effort measured against targets made known to each prisoner in advance.

Within these parameters, governors will establish a standard working week for each activity according to the needs of the establishment; and they may establish differentials between activities in recognition of regime priorities, the regular working of long hours, environmental conditions, and any other factors which in the governor's view merit financial recognition. Governors therefore calculate their budgets for prisoner pay on the basis on an average of £7 per week (£8 per week in dispersal prisons).

Some prisons are able to operate schemes under which prisoners may earn higher amounts for higher productivity. Such schemes must be self-financing. Average earnings under the schemes currently running is about £15 per week, although a few prisoners have been able to boost their earnings to £30 in some weeks.

The Prisoners' Earnings Act 1996, which receive Royal Assent in July, provides a framework by which governors can make deductions from the wages of a prisoner earning enhanced wages in a prison operating the enhanced wages scheme. This allows for payments to be made in respect of a prisoner's own maintenance and accommodation, to support their dependants, towards organisations involved with victims and crime prevention and towards savings against release. It is intended that the Act will be implemented in spring next year.

Doncaster Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the current complement by grade of *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time staff employed by Premier Prison Services at Her Majesty's prison Doncaster; and what changes to staffing levels there have been in the last 12 months; [2712]

(2) how many serious assaults there have been on staff in her Majesty's prison Doncaster since 1 June; and what has been the total number of assaults on staff at the prison since it was opened; [2716]

(3) how many and what types of incidents have been reported to the Prison Service in relation to Her Majesty's prison Doncaster since *(a)* 1 June and *(b)* its opening; [2714]

(4) what is the current ratio of non-health staff to prisoners at *(a)* Her Majesty's prison Doncaster and *(b)* other similar grade prisons; [2713]

(5) how many prisoners at Her Majesty's prison Doncaster have been subject to closed visits since it was opened; and what is the current number; [2717]

(6) what percentage of temporary release decisions have resulted in temporary release failures at Her Majesty's prison Doncaster *(a)* since 1 June and *(b)* since Her Majesty's prison Doncaster was opened; and for each period what was the average failure rate among similar grade prisons; [2711]

(7) how many serious assaults there have been on prisoners in Her Majesty's Prison Doncaster since it was opened. [2715]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 November 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about HMP Doncaster.

The number and type of incidents during the periods covered by your questions recorded centrally for the purpose of analysing trends within prisons are shown on the attached table.

Charges of assaults proven following a disciplinary adjudication were as follows:

Date	*Assaults on prisoners*	*Assaults on staff/others*
1 June 1996 to 31 October 1996	53	20
Opening (20 June 1994) to 31 October 1996	280	219

The percentage of temporary release failures at Doncaster and all other local prisons and remand centres were as follows:

Percentage

	20 June 1994 to 31 October 1996	*1 June 1996 to 31 October 1996*
Doncaster	10.52	None
Other local prisons and remand centres	0.48	0.09

Records have not been kept of the number of prisoners subject to closed visits since the prison opened. Currently 51 prisoners are receiving closed visits.

On 5 November 1996 the ratio of staff (excluding healthcare staff) to prisoners at Doncaster was 1:2:16 and the ratio of similar staff to prisoners in other category B local prisons was 1:2:77.

Information about the overall number of staff in each grade is commercially confidential, but the Prison Service agreed to fund 5 additional prisoner custody officers to introduce at its request a dedicated search team in line with mandatory requirements at other prisons. 12 additional programme and clerical staff have also been recruited to reflect an increase in the capacity of the prison to 900 prisoners.

The complement of full-time staff on 1 November 1996 was 458 compared to 449 on 1 November 1995. The equivalent numbers of part-time staff are, respectively, 17 and 14.

Incident type	*1 June 1996–31 October 1996*	*20 June 1994–31 October 1996*
Assault	52	332
Attempted escape	—	1
Barricade	—	1
Concerted indiscipline	—	18
Death of inmate	—	2
Dirty protest	—	1

Incident[1] type	1 June 1996–31 October 1996	20 June 1994–31 October 1996
Drugs	93	668
Escape	—	1
Fire	1	21
Food refusal	1	8
Key/lock compromise	—	1
Miscellaneous	3	33
Recapture/Surrender	—	11
Self harm	7	110
Suicide	—	5
Tool loss	—	5
Temporary release failure	—	2
Total	157	1,220

[1] The number of prisoners involved in each incident and whether any charges resulting from an incident were proven is not recorded.

Prison Service Performance Indicators

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to increase the number of key performance indicators for the Prison Service which assess standards of custody and control; [2936]

(2) what plans he has to introduce key performance indicators for the Prison Service which assess (i) headquarters staffing levels, (ii) productivity, (iii) efficiency, (iv) standards of staff development and commitment and (v) rates of recidivism; [2937]

(3) what plans he has to increase the number of key performance indicators for the Prison Service which assess (i) standards of physical security and (ii) levels of prisoner discipline; [2938]

(4) what plans he has to introduce key performance indicators for the Prison Service which assess *(a)* levels of drug use, *(b)* availability of rehabilitation services and *(c)* rates of self-inflicted deaths. [2939]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 13 November 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the introduction of new key performance indicators (KPIs) for the Prison Service.

Under the terms of the Framework Document, the KPIs for the Prison Service have to be agreed with Ministers. They are kept regularly under review to ensure that they reflect current key priorities for the Service. Our Corporate Plan 1996–99 explained that Ministers had agreed a number of changes to our KPIs for this year. The Service has achieved in full the KPIs on access to sanitation, and the number of prisoners with the opportunity to exceed minimum visiting entitlement, and these have therefore been discontinued. Three new KPIs were introduced: on the rate of positive testing for drug misuse, the number of prisoners completing programmes accredited as effective in reducing re-offending, and the amount of staff training. Targets for each of these were set for the current year.

Some of the areas you refer to are already covered by existing KPIs, at least in part: for example prisoner discipline is reflected in the KPI on rates of assault, standards of custody are reflected in the KPI on the escape rate, the levels of drug use are reflected in the KPI on positive testing for drug misuse, efficiency is reflected in the KPI on cost per place and staff development in the KPI on the amount of staff training.

Clearly, there is a great deal of public interest in information about the Prison Service. I believe it important to keep KPIs to a manageable number, if we are to focus staff effort and other resources to achieve better results, particularly at a time when the Service is under great pressure. The Home Secretary announced, on 20 May 1996, that some management information not currently featured in KPIs would routinely be reported in our Corporate Plan. The current Corporate Plan includes, for example, information about self-inflicted deaths, staff turnover rates and Headquarters overheads.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the results achieved by the Prison Service on each of its key performance indicators for the first six months of 1996–97; and what assessment he has made of those results against *(a)* the published full year targets for 1996–97 and *(b)* the equivalent phased internal targets for the first six months. [2935]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 13 November 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the results achieved by the Prison Service on each of its key performance indicators (KPIs) for the first six months of 1996–97.

Prison Service KPI performance and targets for 1996–97 and performance from April to September 1996 are shown below (we do not set monthly targets within the annual target because performance on some KPIs is subject to considerable seasonal fluctuation). However, where necessary I indicate below the level of performance required over the rest of the year in order to achieve the target.

KPI 1: Escapes from prisons and from escorts:

To ensure no Category A prisoners escape and to ensure that the number of escapes from prisons and from escorts, expressed as a proportion of the prison population, is at least 10% lower than in 1995–6.

	Category A prisoners	Rate (Per cent.)
1996–1997 target	0	0.21 or lower
April–September 1996 performance	0	0.23

KPI 2: Assaults

To ensure that the number of assaults on staff, prisoners and others, expressed as a proportion of the average population, is lower than in 1995–6.

1996–1997 target: lower than 10.6%

April–September 1996 performance: 9.4%

KPI 3: Random drug testing

To ensure that the rate of positive testing for drugs (the number of random drug tests that prove positive expressed as a percentage of the total number of random tests carried out) is lower in the fourth quarter of 1996–7 than in the first quarter of that year.

April–June 1996 performance: 23.9%

April–September 1996 performance: 23.8%

January–March 1997 target: lower than 23.9%

KPI 4: Overcrowding

To ensure that no prisoners are held three to a cell designed for one.

April–September 1996 performance: No prisoners

KPI 5: Purposeful activity

To ensure that prisoners spend on average at least 26.5 hours per week engaged in purposeful activity.

April–September 1996 performance: 25.4 hours per prisoner per week (this figure is subject to further validation).

We would need to achieve an average of 27.6 hours of purposeful activity per prisoner per week for the rest of the year in order to meet the target.

KPI 6: Time out of cell

To ensure that, by 31 March 1997, at least 60% of prisoners are held in establishments which unlock all prisoners on the standard or enhanced regime for at least 10 hours per weekday.

September 1996 performance: 67%

KPI 7: Completions of accredited offending behaviour programmes

To ensure that at least 1,300 prisoners complete programmes accredited as being effective in reducing re-offending, of whom 650 should complete the Sex Offender Treatment Programme.

	Overall completions	*Sex Offender Treatment Programme completions*
April–September 1996 performance	402	136
April–September 1996 target	650	325
April 1996–March 1997 target	1,300	650

We would need to ensure that 140 prisoners a month complete accredited offending behaviour programmes, of which 86 a month should complete the Sex Offender Treatment Programme, in order to meet the target.

KPI 8: Cost per place

To ensure that the average cost of a prison place does not exceed £24,388.

It is not possible to show a meaningful mid-year figure because spending is not evenly distributed across the year and because the number of places is increasing over the year as new accommodation comes on line. We are however forecasting expenditure outturn within the cash limit, as revised to take account of additional funding agreed in year.

KPI 9: Average training days per staff member

To ensure that on average, staff spend at least six days in training.

April–September 1996 performance: 2.31 days per staff member

We would need to provide an average of 0.65 days training per staff member per month for the rest of the year in order to meet the target.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to revise the way in which statistics are collected for the purpose of measuring the key performance indicators which refer to the Prison Service. [2940]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 13 November 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking if there were any plans to revise the way in which statistics are collected for the purpose of measuring the key performance indicators which refer to the Prison Service.

The Prison Service currently collects its KPI data using a variety of information systems. These collection procedures are under constant review to ensure that monitoring of the KPIs is carried out as promptly and accurately as possible.

Maintenance Work

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current backlog of maintenance work in *(a)* prisons and *(b)* police stations. [2798]

Miss Widdecombe: The Prison Service has an on-going programme to identify, prioritise and carry out maintenance work. Priorities are to preserve a safe and secure environment for prisoners and staff alike and to ensure that as far as reasonably practicable accommodation is kept in use to help cope with the pressure on places resulting from the rising prison population. Because of the nature of maintenance work it is possible that during the year other maintenance schemes might have to be given a higher priority than schemes already in the programme. The situation is monitored and reviewed on a regular basis and the programme revised as necessary.

Despite financial constraints, the schemes which have been identified as having the highest priority are proceeding in 1996–97. Around 50 per cent. of schemes—worth £16 million—have been deferred until later.

Maintenance work in police stations is the responsibility of individual police forces and records are not held centrally.

Dog Breeding

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provisions govern a local authority's duties in respect of the prosecution of a person breeding more than two bitches for the purpose of sale without a licence. [3639]

Mr. Sackville: Section 4 of the Breeding of Dogs Act 1973 empowers a local authority to prosecute a person who keeps an unlicensed dog breeding establishment.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 4 November, *Official Report*, columns *324–25*, what are the names and addresses of the companies or individuals convicted under the Breeding of Dogs Act 1973, as amended by the Breeding of Dogs Act 1991, since 1980. [3502]

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many requests for information the *(a)* police pension scheme and *(b)* fireman's pension scheme have received from pension providers undertaking reviews of pension transfers and opt–outs; in how many cases all appropriate information has been supplied; what is the average length of time taken to supply such information; and what moratorium has been introduced on supplying such information. [3348]

Mr. Maclean: The details requested are not held centrally. It is Government policy that assisting pension providers with their review should not impose a burden on the taxpayer. We hope that the necessary amendments can be made soon to the Police Pensions Act 1976 and the Fire Services Act 1947 to enable police and fire

authorities to deal with the inquiries of personal pension providers in return for a reasonable charge to recover the administrative costs involved.

Soliciting

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women cautioned in each of the last five years for soliciting, broken down by age. [3650]

Mr. Maclean: The information is given in the tables.

Table A: Number of recorded male cautions for the offence of soliciting or importuning in a public place for immoral purposes[1], by age, 1991 to 1995

England and Wales

Age	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
10	—	—	—	—	—
11	—	—	—	—	—
12	—	—	—	—	—
13	—	—	—	—	—
14	—	2	3	1	—
15	1	2	—	1	—
16	3	2	1	2	—
17	1	4	2	—	1
18	4	3	—	1	1
19	2	6	7	3	3
20	4	4	7	1	2
21–24	17	21	20	13	10
25–29	26	23	22	35	12
30–34	15	24	24	44	24
35–39	26	21	30	28	9
40–44	26	19	21	26	15
45–49	16	16	30	33	12
50–54	13	17	18	20	12
55–59	4	9	8	18	6
60 and over	27	20	12	28	19
All ages	185	193	205	254	126

[1] An offence under the Sexual Offences Act 1956, section 32.

Table B: Number of recorded male cautions for the offence of persistent soliciting of women for the purpose of prostitution[1], by age, 1991 to 1995

England and Wales

Age	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
10	—	—	—	—	—
11	—	—	—	—	—
12	—	—	—	—	—
13	—	—	—	—	—
14	—	—	—	—	—
15	—	—	—	—	—
16	1	—	—	—	—
17	—	—	1	1	—
18	1	2	—	—	—
19	3	1	1	—	—
20	3	4	1	4	1
21–24	9	16	9	3	1
25–29	19	24	22	7	3
30–34	28	32	21	16	—
35–39	18	31	19	12	3
40–44	21	22	18	8	1
45–49	16	19	10	7	—
50–54	6	9	5	4	1
55–59	2	6	4	3	—
60 and over	3	5	3	1	—
All ages	130	171	114	66	10

[1] An offence under the Sexual Offences Act 1985 Section 2.

Table C: Number of recorded female cautions for the offence of "Common prostitute loitering or soliciting for the purposes of prostitution"[1] by age, 1991 to 1995

England and Wales

Age	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
10	—	1	—	—	—
11	—	—	—	—	—
12	1	1	—	1	2
13	5	1	5	5	4
14	10	6	32	19	11
15	34	41	32	25	27
16	111	62	82	91	63
17	200	189	145	156	156
18	318	275	247	194	187
19	294	250	260	206	201
20	292	244	211	220	212
21–24	946	813	860	621	769
25–29	868	804	809	712	692
30–34	451	557	527	542	466
35–39	184	216	248	199	238
40–44	84	129	104	101	80
45–49	33	56	42	34	43
50–54	8	3	7	5	6
55–59	1	3	5	2	5
60 and over	—	2	—	—	—
All ages	3,840	3,653	3,616	3,133	3,162

[1] An offence under the Street Offences Act 1859 Section 1.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to issue guidance to local authorities about funding from April 1997 under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1996. [4452]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce his decision regarding the continued funding of schemes in Trafford currently funded under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966. [3823]

Mr. Kirkhope: We attach great importance to the valuable work performed by teachers and others funded under section 11 in helping members of ethnic minorities to overcome barriers of language or culture. Despite other pressures on public expenditure generally, I can now announce that the current level of section 11 grant will be maintained until August 1998. Grant recipients are being advised accordingly.

Buckley Hall Prison

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason two different figures were given in letters of 29 October from the Director General of the Prison Service to the hon. Member for Rochdale for the number of assaults at HMP Buckley Hall since 14 December 1994. [3360]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 13 November 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about the different figures given in my letters of 29 October about the number of assaults at Buckley Hall prison since 14 December 1994.

I very much regret that my replies did not distinguish between and explain the different kinds of data used in replying to each Question.

The number of assaults given in response to your Question about all types of incidents was taken from information recorded on a central database. This provides an analysis of trends within the Prison Service on a wide range of types of incident for use in incident management. They do not take account of the number of individuals who have been involved in a single incident, whether an assault or otherwise, nor do they take account, in the case of assaults, of whether there is a resulting finding of guilt either in an internal disciplinary adjudication or criminal proceedings.

The figures given in response to the Question about the number of assaults that had occurred were based on the number of charges of assaults proven following an internal disciplinary adjudication. This information is used for the purposes of a Key Performance Indicator.

Steps are being taken to ensure that future Questions are answered in a way that makes this distinction clear.

Hand Gun Licences

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information his Department collates on the number of persons currently licensed to carry handguns in the countryside for the purposes of killing animals for sport. [3109]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* Killing animals for sport would normally not be considered a good reason for possessing a hand gun.

Electric Shock Dog Collars

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what guidelines he has issued to (i) police authorities and (ii) the Prison Service on the use of dog collars that administer electric shocks to the animals; [3073]

(2) which (i) police authorities, (ii) prisons and (iii) sectors of the Prison Service are using dog collars that administer electric shocks to the animals; [3074]

(3) what is the number of dogs owned by (i) the police and (ii) the Prison Service on which electric shock dog collars *(a)* have been used and *(b)* are being used. [3075]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answers 11 November 1996]:* The Prison Service has possessed an electric collar since January 1994. It is kept at the national dog training centre and has been used a total of seven times on six dogs.

The electric collar is not currently being used on any dog and is only ever used in accordance with the policy guidelines issued on 19 July 1996. These guidelines state that the electric collar will be used only when authorised by the head of the NDTC. It will be used on adult dogs as part of a training course or remedial training and only as a last resort when other methods of attempting to correct the dog in control-related exercises have failed. The collar is not to be used as a short–term solution for problems that can be resolved by other more traditional and acceptable methods. All uses of the collar are registered at the NDTC.

The police have no national guidelines for the use of electric dog collars and information on its use is not collected centrally.

Ella O'Dwyer

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons applications for compassionate parole by Ella O'Dwyer, detained in Maghaberry prison, have been refused; how many such applications she has made in the current year; what her prison status is; and if he will make a statement. [3303]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* Ms O'Dwyer is a prisoner temporarily transferred to Northern Ireland. Applications for temporary release are therefore considered with reference to her eligibility under the rules which apply to prisoners in England and Wales. As a category A high escape risk prisoner, Ms O'Dwyer is not eligible for any form of temporary release under those rules. However, we have the power to authorise release under section 27 of the Criminal Justice Act 1961 and have therefore considered each of Ms O'Dwyer's three applications for release on compassionate grounds carefully and on their individual merits. I did not consider, however, that there were sufficient compelling grounds to justify granting release exceptionally.

Prisoner Escapes

Mr. Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how convicted prisoners escaped from a private coach on 5 November in London while being transferred from Her Majesty's prison, Blundeston; for what reasons a secure vehicle was not used; what changes he expects to make to the system for transporting prisoners; and if he will make a statement. [3392]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. David Porter, dated 13 November 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how convicted prisoners escaped from a private coach on 5 November in London while being transferred from Blundeston prison; for what reasons a secure vehicle was not used, and what changes are excepted to be made to the system of transporting prisoners.

The prisoners who escaped were category B prisoners. Our policy on the transporting of category B prisoners is that they should be transported in as secure a vehicle as possible, based on a thorough risk assessment of the likelihood of escape. In this particular case it was decided that a secure vehicle was not required.

A senior director in the Prison Service has completed an enquiry into the incident. He has put forward nine recommendations, which I have accepted. He has recommended that we should aim to use secure cellular vehicles for all multiple escorts of category B prisoners, as soon as the necessary equipment can be acquired. The Director of Security has been asked to examine the implementation of this recommendation.

Prisoner Repatriations

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 5 November, *Official Report*, column *440*, when the requests for repatriation to prison in the Irish Republic from Harry Duggen and Joe O'Connell will be decided; when the appropriate documents will be referred to the Irish Republic; and if he will make a statement. [3784]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:* Agreement to repatriation requests requires the consent of both states as well as of the prisoner concerned. Requests are decided only after consideration of all the relevant information by the two states concerned. An initial decision on whether to refer the requests of Mr. Duggan and Mr. O'Connell to the Republic will be made once all the relevant information is available.

WALES

General Practitioners

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will report progress on the survey of general practice practitioners and trainees in Wales; when he expects the results of the survey to be compiled; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [2643]

Mr. Hague: The information is not yet in a suitable form for publication. A decision on publication will be made when the work has been completed. I cannot yet indicate when this will be.

Prescribed Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of, and how many, people admitted to hospital have been suffering from adverse reactions to a prescribed drug in each of the last five years and in age bands of 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [2904]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the number of people admitted to hospital as a result of an adverse reaction to a prescribed drug is not available centrally. However the number of people admitted as a result of an adverse reaction to any drug is given in the following table.

Finished consultant episodes—adverse effect of drugs

Age	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*[1]1995–96*
0–9 years	19	23	48	21	11
10–19 years	5	6	8	10	9
20–29 years	11	17	9	7	2
30–39 years	7	16	6	8	6
40–49 years	11	15	7	7	6
50–59 years	11	12	15	10	9
60–69 years	30	22	20	19	9
70–79 years	28	37	15	28	7
80 years and over	2	2	3	2	1
Not known	19	19	18	23	5
Total	143	169	149	135	65

Note:
[1] Data for 1995–96 are not comparable to earlier years as records are not available for all hospitals and the diagnosis code used was different from earlier years.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many elderly *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been admitted to hospital in Wales as a consequence of an adverse reaction to (i) non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, (ii) phenothiazines, (iii) diuretics, (iv) analgesics, (v) night sedation, (vi) digoxin, (vii) laxatives, (viii) corticosteroids, (ix) beta blockers and (x) aminophylline in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [2901]

Mr. Jones: The information requested is not available centrally.

Maintenance Work

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current backlog of maintenance work in *(a)* educational institutions, *(b)* prisons and police stations, *(c)* council housing, *(d)* transport infrastructure, *(e)* the NHS and *(f)* defence bases in Wales. [2793]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Prisons and police stations are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department. Defence bases in Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. Information on the backlog of work in educational institutions and council housing is not held centrally. Information regarding transport and council housing is not held centrally. Information regarding transport infrastructure could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The latest figure for backlog maintenance in the NHS is £275 million as at March 1995.

Graduates

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of young people graduated in the last available year; and what comparisons he has made with the figures for *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* each member of the European Union. [3038]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In 1994–95 11,045 UK domiciled students graduated with a first degree from Welsh higher education institutions. These represented 31 per cent. of the population of 21-year-olds, corresponding to the most common age at graduation. On a similar basis, 32 per cent. of young people graduated from Scottish higher education institutions and 30 per cent. from English higher education institutions.

Information is not available on a comparable basis for 1994–95 for other European Union countries, but limited information is available for 1991–92 and is shown on the following table.

Public and private university education graduates as a percentage of the population at theoretical age of graduation 1991–92

	Per cent.
Denmark	22.1
Greece	11.8
Ireland	17.4
Italy	0.7
Netherlands	17.8
Spain	8.0
Sweden	11.4
UK	20.4

Source:
OECD "Education at a Glance".

Health Authority Funding

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the additional non-recurring funding allocated to each health authority in the current financial year; and how much has been allocated to each contracted health care provider. [3438]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Up to the end of October, Welsh health authorities have received the following non-recurrent funding allocation additions:

Health Authority	*Total additional funding £000s*
North Wales	4,198
Dyfed Powys	3,084
Morgannwg	3,738
Bro Taf	5,644
Gwent	3,924

Details on health care providers' income are not kept centrally.

TRANSPORT

Red Routes

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he has taken to measure pedestrian activity along red routes (i) before and (ii) after their implementation. [3437]

Mr. Bowis: The traffic director for London, who is responsible for co-ordinating the introduction of the red route network, monitors the effects of implementation through comprehensive surveys each year. These surveys monitor pedestrian activity on shopping streets and the number of shoppers arriving on foot. The results of surveys in spring 1994, before implementation began, were included in "Red Routes and Retailing" published in October 1995. The next set of results from surveys conducted in spring 1995 will be published shortly. As more of the red route network is implemented, these annual surveys will provide a representative before and after picture of the effect of red route measures.

Bridge Strengthening Programme

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the expenditure on the bridge strengthening programme planned for *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 1998–99. [3695]

Mr. Watts: Each year the Government provide the Highways Agency with an overall budget for the maintenance of trunk road structures and, through transport supplementary grant and credit approvals, support to local highway authorities for their bridge programme. For 1996–97 the Highways Agency's budget for structures capital maintenance is £130 million, and approved expenditure by local highway authorities is £103 million. In neither case are funds specifically earmarked for bridge strengthening. Figures for subsequent years have not yet been determined.

HEALTH

Eye Tests (Children)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision his Department has made for national eye screening of children. [2316]

Mr. Malone: An examination of the eyes is a mandatory part of all neonatal examinations conducted by a paediatrician, general practitioner or health visitor. A test for visual acuity is also conducted, usually by the school nurse, on entry to school. Health authorities are expected to assess the needs of their populations for visual examinations and organise appropriate screening programmes to meet these needs. Information is not collected centrally on the precise arrangements made in each authority area.

Guidance on the need for visual examinations has been issued in the publication "Health for All Children" first published in 1989. The latest edition was issued in 1996 and commended to health authorities in the guide, "Child Health in the Community: A Guide to Good Practice", published on 5 September 1996.

It is for health authorities to decide how to implement this guidance but, in most areas, school nurses undertake sight tests shortly after a child starts school. Health authorities are expected to monitor these arrangements and, in addition, the Department is in regular contact with representatives of paediatricians, ophthalmologists and nurses on developments in the assessment and treatment of sight defects in children.

Prescribed Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department issues to general practitioners prescribing drugs to the elderly; and if he will make a statement. [2791]

Mr. Malone: Advice on prescribing issues, including prescribing for elderly patients, is available to general practitioners from a variety of sources. Publications funded by the Department include the British National Formulary, which is regularly updated and provides advice for all doctors on the choice of suitable drugs, and the "MeReC Bulletin", which provides prescribing advice to all general practitioners. Copies of the British National Formulary are available in the Library. Copies of the "MeReC Bulletin" will be placed in the Library shortly.

Health Authorities

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make additional funding available to meet the estimated deficits for the current financial year in health authorities *(a)* in the west midlands and *(b)* across England and Wales. [3284]

Mr. Malone: No additional funding is planned in the current financial year in England. Questions relating to Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Health authorities received an average cash increase of 3.9 per cent. in 1996–97. Health authorities are expected to manage within these resources and will benefit also from on-going improvements in efficiency.

Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the minutes of meetings of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation held in the last year; and if he will make such minutes publicly available in the future. [3425]

Mr. Horam: The minutes of the meetings of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation are confidential. This is to ensure full and frank discussions can be recorded on issues which may include factors affecting external commercial interest and personal medical information. The recommendations of the committee, as endorsed by Ministers, are made available in the publication, "Immunisation Against Infectious Disease", the most recent edition of which was published in September 1996 and copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the next meeting of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation will take place; and what issues will be discussed. [3424]

Mr. Horam: The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation meets twice annually; its next meeting is on 13 November. As with all JCVI meetings, discussion will cover all aspects of communicable diseases preventable, or potentially preventable, through immunisation.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has received from the hepatitis sub-group of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation regarding universal vaccination against hepatitis B; and if the next meeting of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation will consider this subject. [3426]

Mr. Horam: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State receives advice on immunisation from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation. The next meeting of JCVI is on 13 November and will include further discussions on the control of hepatitis B in the United Kingdom, as well as other immunisation matters.

Teenage Smoking

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his revised target date for meeting the "The Health of the Nation" target on teenage smoking; and what steps he is taking to reach this target. [3427]

Mr. Horam: Efforts will continue to achieve the target level of 6 per cent. for teenage smoking as soon as possible.

The teenage lifestyle programme, "Respect" was launched in July and will cost up to £1 million a year for three years. Adult health education programmes will encourage parents to set a good example. Other measures in the Government strategy, including increasing tax and preventing illegal sales, are continuing.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of whether the series of events for teenagers currently being sponsored by the Gallaher tobacco company conforms to the voluntary agreement on tobacco advertising in respect of *(a)* the requirement not to encourage smoking in general and

(b) the requirement not to target young people; and if he will make representations to the company to halt further events pending clarification. [3428]

Mr. Horam: The operation of the voluntary agreement is overseen by the Committee for Monitoring Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship. I have no reason to suspect that the events being sponsored by Silk Cut breach the voluntary agreement, but I am confident that the committee will fully investigate any evidence put to it.

Abortions (Folic Acid)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the effect on the incidence of abortions of adding folic acid to bread. [3589]

Mr. Horam: Folic acid is currently added to some 10 per cent. of bread. Fortifying bread with this vitamin has only been practised, as a voluntary measure by the manufacturers, in very recent years. It is not possible to assess whether this limited and recent change in the diet has had an effect on the incidence of spontaneous abortions or whether this change has influenced the number of pregnancies affected by neural tube defects whose outcome has been termination of pregnancy.

A sub-group of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy is considering whether extending such fortification is advisable, and is expected to report late in 1997.

Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the last meeting of the Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health took place; and what was discussed. [3420]

Mr. Horam: The Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health last met on 15 October 1996. The committee received information on the progress of work it has commissioned on environmental tobacco smoke and lung cancer and on ETS and childhood respiratory diseases. The structure and content of the first report of SCOTH to the Chief Medical Officer were discussed and suggestions for the future work programme were considered.

Infertility Treatment

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the latest advice his Department has issued to *(a)* purchasers and *(b)* providers of infertility treatment in the NHS; if he will place this information in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [2068]

Mr. Horam: Decisions about provision, priority and resources for infertility services are made by individual health authorities, who are in the best position to determine priorities in the light of local needs and circumstances. The decisions must be made on the basis of sound evidence.

Advice is available to health authorities and clinicians in the following publications:

The Effective Health Care Bulletin on "The Management of Subfertility" (August 1992), published for the NHS management executive by a consortium of Leeds and York universities and the research unit of the Royal College of Physicians.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists "Infertility—Guidelines for Practice".

Copies of these are available in the Library.

The RCOG is reviewing its 1992 guidance as part of a project sponsored by the Department of Health. The revised guidelines should be available to clinicians next year.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned in the last two years into the effectiveness of alternative infertility treatments. [2069]

Mr. Horam: None. Information on research commissioned by the Department of Health is contained in the "Centrally Commissioned Research Programme" and the "Centrally Commissioned Research Programme: Commissions in 1994–95", copies of which are available in the Library.

Children in Care

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children on care orders are placed in bed–and–breakfast accommodation. [3644]

Mr. Burns: This information is not separately available as the details collected centrally do not distinguish bed and breakfast from other lodging or independent accommodation.

Secure Hospitals

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects disciplinary and grievance procedures for staff to be in place for *(a)* Ashworth, *(b)* Rampton and *(c)* Broadmoor. [3645]

Mr. Burns: Disciplinary and grievance procedures are in place at all three high security hospitals.

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of breaches of security incidents in each of the last five years for *(a)* Rampton, *(b)* Ashworth and *(c)* Broadmoor. [3646]

Mr. Burns: The following tables list the number of breaches of security incidents at the three high security hospitals. For the purposes of this survey roof top incidents were classified as a breach of security although incidents of this kind are not uncommon in a high security mental health environment. Staff are fully trained to deal with this challenging group of patients and untoward incidents in the three hospitals are speedily contained and swiftly resolved.

It is worth pointing out that thousands of rehabilitation programmes outside secure mental health environments take place every year without incident. The secure hospitals are places of treatment and care, and rehabilitation is a key component of the management of people with severe and enduring mental health problems. In view of the level of public concern over recent patient absconds while on rehabilitation programmes, the following measures were deemed necessary.

The High Security Psychiatric Services Commissioning Board, the three special health authorities, specialist clinicians, the mental health and community care division of the Department of Health and the Home Office have

established, with immediate effect, a steering group to examine professional practice around rehabilitation programmes outside secure mental health environments.

Breaches of security at Broadmoor hospital authority

Type/year	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*Total*
Escape	—	1	—	—	—	1
Abscond	1	4	—	—	—	5
Roof-top	—	—	—	—	1	1
Hostage	—	—	—	—	—	0
Total	1	5	0	0	1	7

Breaches of security at Ashworth hospital authority

Type/year	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*Total*
Escape	—	2	—	—	—	2
Abscond	1	3	2	2	3	11
Roof-top[1]	—	1	11	9	6	27
Hostage	—	—	1	—	1	2
Total	1	6	14	11	10	42

[1] Please note that it is relatively easy to climb on the roofs of wards in the north and south campus of Ashworth hospital authority. The hospital does not regard this as a breach of security.

Breaches of security at Rampton hospital authority

Type/year	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*Total*
Escape	—	—	1	—	—	1
Abscond	3	1	—	1	—	5
Roof-top	—	—	—	—	—	0
Hostage	—	—	—	—	—	0
Total	3	1	1	1	0	6

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the number of recorded assaults on staff in each of the past five years at *(a)* Rampton, *(b)* Ashworth and *(c)* Broadmoor; [3647]

(2) if he will list the number of prosecutions for assaults on staff in each of the past five years for *(a)* Rampton, *(b)* Ashworth and *(c)* Broadmoor; [3648]

(3) on what dates the most recent work place risk assessments for *(a)* Broadmoor, *(b)* Rampton and *(c)* Ashworth were completed. [3649]

Mr. Burns: Data about recorded assaults on staff in each of the past five years, the number of prosecutions for assaults on staff and the most recent work place assessments at Ashworth, Rampton and Broadmoor are not kept centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mrs. Janice Miles, the chief executive of Ashworth hospital authority, Ms Sheila Foley, the chief executive of Rampton hospital authority, and Mr. Alan Franey, the chief executive of Broadmoor hospital authority for further information.

National Health Service

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are his plans for the future of the national health service; and if he will make a statement. [4276]

Mr. Dorrell: I have today published a White Paper on the way forward for the national health service entitled, "The National Health Service: A Service with Ambitions". Copies will be available in the Vote Office and the Library. It sets out the Government's commitment to a universal, high quality service, available on the basis of clinical need, and one that is responsive to the needs and wishes of patients and carers. It also launches three initiatives designed to improve the use of information in the NHS; to strengthen its commitment to effective management of quality; and to ensure that our policies for education, training and development produce well qualified staff who will meet the needs of a changing NHS.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Teacher Training

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the percentage of college graduates obtaining teaching posts in each year from 1989–90. [2996]

Mr. Ancram: The available figures are:

1989–90: 88 per cent.

1990–91: 91 per cent.

1991–92: 96 per cent.

1992–93: 98 per cent.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the size of the approved intake of students into colleges of education in the current and future years and the reasons for his decisions on future teacher supply. [2997]

Mr. Ancram: This year's intake number was maintained at last year's total of 340 places. No decisions have been taken on future years' intakes as each year's allocation is based on an annually updated forecast of teacher demand.

Student Costs

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the unit cost per student and constant price cost per student in each year from 1989–90, starting with unit cost per student equalling 100 in 1989–90. [2998]

Mr. Ancram: The recurrent cost per full-time equivalent student, excluding student support, at universities in Northern Ireland, indexed so that 1989–90 equals 100, has been as follows:

	Cash prices	*Constant prices*
1989–90	100	100
1990–91	105	97
1991–92	107	93
1992–93	106	89
1993–94	105	86
1994–95	103	82

Source:
Universities' Statistical Record data, 1989–90 to 1993–94; HESA data 1994–95.

The spending per full-time equivalent student, excluding support, in further education colleges in Northern Ireland, indexed so that 1991–92 equals 100, has been as follows:

	Cash prices	*Constant prices*
1991–92	100	100
1992–93	98	94
1993–94	101	95
1994–95	106	98

Comparable figures for 1989–90 and 1990–91 are not available.

Universities (Student-Staff Ratio)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the student-staff ratios in universities in each year since 1989–90. [2999]

Mr. Ancram: The staff-student ratios are as follows:

1989–90: 1:13.6

1990–91: 1:14.5

1991–92: 1:15.6

1992–93: 1:15.7

1993–94: 1:16.4

1994–95: 1:14.8[1].

[1] Revised figure. The ratio for 1994–95 is not comparable with the ratios for earlier years, because of a change in the basis of the count of staff in 1994–95.

Higher Education

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of young people in Northern Ireland have entered higher education in the United Kingdom in each of the past 10 years. [3000]

Mr. Ancram: The proportion of young people aged under 21 expressed as a percentage of the Northern Ireland 18-year-old population, has been as follows:

1986–87: 19.4

1987–88: 20.4

1988–89: 22.4

1989–90: 25.6

1990–91: 27.0

1991–92: 29.2

1992–93: 33.3

1993–94: 37.0

1994–95: 38.5

1995–96: 41.7[1].

[1] Provisional.

Further Education (Staff–Student Ratio)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the staff–student ratio in further education in *(a)* 1989–90 and *(b)* 1995–96. [3001]

Mr. Ancram: The relevant staff–student ratios are as follows:

1989–90—1:11.61

1995–96—1:14.01.

Further Education (Teachers)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of full-time equivalent teachers in further education in 1989–90; and what it is currently. [3002]

Mr. Ancram: The relevant numbers of full-time equivalent teachers are as follows:

1989–90: 2,850.9

1995–96: 2,813.02.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what facilities exist for the training of further education lecturers in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [3003]

Mr. Ancram: New full-time, permanent lecturers who do not already possess an approved teacher training qualification are expected to achieve the postgraduate certificate in further and higher education within three years of appointment. In-service training awards are available from the Department to assist such lecturers attend this part-time course at the University of Ulster.

Further Education (Students)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the age profile of full-time students in further education *(a)* in 1989–90 and *(b)* currently. [3004]

Mr. Ancram: The age profile of full-time students in further education in each year is as follows:

Age	*Full-time enrolments*
1989–90	
Under 18	14,887
19–24	1,645
25–34	327
35–44	90
45 and over	113
1995–96	
Under 18	19,425
19–24	3,858
25–34	432
35–44	137
45 and over	82

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of full-time equivalent students enrolled in further education but taking higher level courses in each year since 1989–90. [3006]

Mr. Ancram: The number of full-time equivalent students enrolled in further education but taking higher level courses in each year since 1989–90 are as follows:

Year	*Full-time equivalents*
1989–90	1,441
1990–91	1,531
1991–92	1,620
1992–93	1,961
1993–94	2,295

Year	Full-time equivalents
1994–95	3,146
1995–96	3,687

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the number of young people enrolled on national vocational qualification and general national vocational qualification courses in further education in recent years. [3007]

Mr. Ancram: In 1993–94, 995 national vocational qualifications awards were made by the main bodies to persons aged 19 or under; in 1994–95 the figure was 756. Enrolments in general national vocational qualifications programmes in further education colleges were as follows:

1992–93: 566

1993–94: 2,645

1994–95: 5,234.

Further Education (Costs)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the cost of a full-time equivalent place in further education in constant prices in each year since 1989–90. [3005]

Mr. Ancram: The spending per full-time equivalent student in further education colleges has been as follows:

Constant 1995–95 prices

	£
1991–92	2,946
1992–93	2,783
1993–94	2,789
1994–95	2,874

Comparable figures for 1989–90 and 1990–91 are not available.

Surplus School Places

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many surplus primary and secondary school places were removed in the last school session; and if he will make a statement. [3008]

Mr. Ancram: A total of 1,295 primary school places were removed in the 1995–96 school year. No surplus secondary school places were removed.

School Pupil Costs

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the recurrent cost per pupil in primary, secondary and special education in each year since 1989–90, starting with the current cost in that year equalling 100. [3009]

Mr. Ancram: Expenditure per pupil figures in constant prices is as follows:

	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Primary: 1992–93 (£1,429) = 100	100	107	114
Secondary: 1992–93 (£2,243) = 100	100	105	111

Information for primary and secondary is not available for 1989–90, 1990–91 or 1991–92 on a comparable basis. Summary information on all forms of special education is not available.

School Pupil-Teacher Ratios

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the pupil-teacher ratio in primary and secondary schools in each year since 1989–90. [3010]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is contained in the table.

Pupil-teacher ratios in Northern Ireland schools

	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Primary[1]	23.2	22.8	22.6	22.2	21.6	20.8
Secondary[2]	14.7	14.7	15.1	15.2	15.1	14.8

[1] Includes pupils and teachers in nursery and reception classes.

[2] Includes secondary and grammar schools.

Department of Education (Costs)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a breakdown of the administrative costs of the Department of Education by sub-headings in each year since 1989–90. [3011]

Mr. Ancram: I will write to the hon. Member when the information becomes available.

Domestic Rates

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the average rate bill per household in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years. [3939]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Rate Collection Agency under its chief executive, Mr. David Gallagher. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Gallagher to Dr. Marjorie Mowlam, dated 13 November 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the average rate bill for households in each of the last ten years.

The average rate bill for domestic properties in each rating year from 1987/88 was:

Year	Average (£)
1987–88	233.57
1988–89	254.71
1989–90	284.55
1990–91	309.79
1991–92	222.20
1992–93	224.79
1993–94	230.59
1994–95	251.41

Year	Average (£)
1995–96	294.57
1996–97	[1]305.00

[1] Estimate.

The above figures have been calculated by taking the total sum of rates assessed for domestic properties (including Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties) and dividing that sum by the total number of domestic properties.

I hope that you find this information helpful.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the rules and regulations he proposes to repeal or amend by means of a reference to the Deregulation Committee before the end of 1996; and if he will make a statement. [3779]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:* My right hon. and learned Friend will not be submitting any rules or regulations to the Deregulation Committee.

In its deliberation of the 1994 Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill, Parliament decided that the general order-making power which enables Ministers to amend primary legislation by subordinate order for deregulatory purposes would not extend to Northern Ireland.

Any deregulatory measures introduced in Great Britain by means of reference to the Deregulation Committee will, where appropriate, be replicated in Northern Ireland by the Order in Council procedure.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Feline Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to *(a)* encourage the reporting and *(b)* collate statistics on the incidence of feline spongiform encephalopathy, indicating the dates for each action taken; and if he will make a statement. [435]

Mrs. Browning: Since November 1994, the diagnosis of any transmissible spongiform encephalopathy in the laboratory, other than those produced by experimental means in the course of research, has been officially notifiable. A free post mortem examination for FSE to encourage the reporting of FSE cases by veterinary practitioners has been available through the veterinary investigation service of MAFF since May 1990.

Statistics have been collated by the Government since 1990, when the first case of FSE was confirmed. FSE statistics were provided for the hon. Member on 11 November 1996, *Official Report,* columns *73–74.*

Peanut Warnings

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what obligations *(a)* companies, *(b)* organisations and *(c)* individuals providing catering facilities have to warn customers who may be allergic to peanuts of their presence in food that they provide; and if he will make a statement; [3234]

(2) what obligations manufacturers of food products containing peanuts have, in addition to listing the products' ingredients, with regard to warning sufferers from peanut-related allergic reactions of the presence of peanuts; and if he will make a statement. [3233]

Mrs. Browning: All food offered for sale must meet the food safety requirements of the Food Safety Act 1990. There is no specific rule requiring caterers to indicate the presence of peanuts in their foodstuffs. However, many establishments are now aware that some consumers suffer reactions to peanuts and indicate their presence, or absence, in the food that they sell. This is either by a motif or by using the word peanut in the name of the food. Manufacturers of prepacked food have taken similar steps on product labels. There is a legal obligation that such information should not mislead the purchaser.

Smallholdings

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assistance his Department gives to encourage smallholdings. [3452]

Mr. Boswell: The Ministry's policies and support for agricultural businesses apply both to smallholdings and to larger businesses. In carrying out our various programmes to improve the economic performance of the agriculture industry, full account is taken of the needs of small businesses. Small businesses also benefit from the Ministry's implementation of the Government's deregulation policies.

Fisheries Agreements (West Africa)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 28 October, *Official Report,* column *52,* what has been the United Kingdom's contribution to the fisheries agreements with the west African countries. [3822]

Mr. Baldry: The annual cost to the Community budget of the EC fisheries agreements with west African countries is estimated to be 212 million ecu or £166 million. The UK's contribution will be around 15 per cent.

Argentine Beef Imports

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on trends in the levels of imports into the United Kingdom of Argentine beef since 1993; what checks are made at ports of entry for the presence of steroids in such beef; and if he will make a statement. [3787]

Mr. Baldry: Overseas trade statistics for imports of beef from Argentina into the United Kingdom are as follows:

1993: 14,285

1994:[1] 14,917

1995:[1] 28,289

1996 to July:[1] 14,634.

All data are in tonnes.

[1] Provisional data.

All third countries intending to export animal products to the EU are required to submit plans for residue surveillance for approval by the EU standing veterinary committee. They are also required to submit their results to the Commission as evidence that the surveillance plans are being carried out. Such imports are checked upon entry to verify compliance with animal and public health conditions of import, including conditions relating to steroids. All imports undergo a documentary check. In addition, a percentage are subject to additional identity and physical checks, including checks for prohibited hormones.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the estimated reduction in expenditure on *(a)* social security benefits, *(b)* welfare benefits and *(c)* free school meals for social security benefits recipients if all those aged 18 to 65 years, who were able to work, earned (A) £120, (B) £140 and (C) £160 per week gross of tax and national insurance contributions and 16 and 17-year-olds earned (i) £60, (ii) £70 and (iii) £80 per week gross. [2002]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the tables.

Table 1 shows the net benefit savings if all the claimant unemployed earned the levels stated.

Table 2 shows the additional net benefit savings if those currently in work with earnings below the levels stated were to earn the stated value, and work 30 hours or more a week. All figures must be regarded as broad estimates of the potential benefit savings.

Table 1: Net benefit savings if the unemployed claimant earned £120, £140 or £160 per week

	Earnings		
	£120	*£140*	*£160*
Net benefit savings	£6,900 million	£7,300 million	£7,600 million

1 Estimates are based on 2.1 million unemployed, at 1996–97 prices.

2. Estimates are rounded to the nearest £100 million.

3. All claimants unemployed are assumed to work 30 hours or more a week.

4. All partners of claimants unemployed who are identified as in work and earning below the level stated are assumed to work for 30 hours a week at the new level of earnings.

5. Net benefit savings include the value of free school meals.

6. Estimates exclude expenditure implications for welfare benefits.

7. Sixteen and 17-year-olds are deemed to earn £60, £70 or £80 per week in place of £120, £140 and £160 respectively.

8. Estimates are based on figures from the 1996 departmental report, the 1995 Quarterly Statistical Enquiry and the 1994 Family Resources Survey uprated to 1996–97 prices.

Table 2: Net benefit savings if those currently in work earning less than the value earned £120, £140 or £160 per week

	Earnings		
	£120	*£140*	*£160*
Net benefit savings	£1,000 million	£1,300 million	£1,600 million

1. Estimates are set at 1996–97 prices.
2. Estimates are rounded to the nearest £100 million.
3. All those affected are assumed to work at least 30 hours a week.
4. Net benefit savings include the value of free school meals.
5. Estimates exclude expenditure implications for welfare benefits.
6. Sixteen and 17-year-olds are deemed to earn £60, £70 or £80 per week in place of £120, £140 and £160 respectively.
7. Estimates are based on the 1995 Quarterly Statistical Enquiry and the 1994–95 Family Resources Survey uprated to 1996–97 prices.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the date on which the Child Support Agency received an application from the parent with care in case 1017680981 for a compensatory award and the date on which he expects that case to be referred to the special payments branch; and if he will make a statement. [2972]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. David Lidington, dated 12 November 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency case reference 1017680981.

An application for compensation was received on 5 January 1996. In this case, the Agency could not consider the application until a full maintenance assessment had been calculated. A full assessment was calculated on 29 May 1996, and since then every effort has been made by the Agency to secure regular maintenance for the parent with care, culminating in the imposition of a deduction from earnings order on 1 October 1996.

The claim for compensation was passed to the Agency's Special Payments Branch on 1 November 1996. Based on the information then available, it was decided that a compensation payment was not appropriate. However, further information has since come to light and it has now been accepted that compensation can be paid. A revised decision has been issued and a compensation payment of £1,651.73 paid.

I hope this is helpful.

Statutory Sick Pay and Maternity Pay

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of raising statutory sick pay and statutory maternity pay to the level of the lower earnings limit and of the number of people gaining from this. [2782]

Mr. Heald: It is estimated that the gross cost of raising the current rate of statutory sick pay and lower rate of statutory maternity pay to the lower earnings limit would be around £135 million per annum. It is not possible to estimate the number of people who would gain from this as many people will already be covered by occupational sick or maternity pay schemes and there is no reliable current information on the extent of this cover.

Note:
Estimated expenditure is at current prices and is rounded to the nearest £5 million.

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the amounts and types of benefit recouped by the compensation recovery unit which have been reimbursed to the national insurance fund for *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96. [2780]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 12 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking, what were the amounts and types of benefit recouped by the Compensation Recovery Unit which have been reimbursed to the National Insurance Fund for *(a)*1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96.

The information requested is shown in the attached table.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Accounts and types of benefit recouped by the compensation recovery unit

Benefit type	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £	*1995–96* £
Invalidity benefit[1]	31,506,196.35	51,912,225.48	45,957,227.95
Incapacity benefit[1]	nil	nil	21,806,993.44
Unemployment benefit[1]	236,168.62	355,419.58	518,384.73
Sickness benefit[1]	3,027,307.11	4,391,479.21	5,039,440.94
Income support	5,188,320.46	7,999,922.25	10,150,965.02
Attendance allowance	495,364.16	876,537.69	839,317.51
Statutory sick pay	13,874,752.39	17,268,020.26	15,281,003.03
Mobility allowance	942,886.54	1,039,547.38	821,166.41
Industrial injuries disablement benefit	7,899,333.58	12,511,359.68	16,429,575.75
Constant attendance allowance	136,815.64	244,809.00	266,496.25
Reduced earnings allowance	4,894,461.35	5,236,865.95	4,176,652.21
Retirement allowance	3,506.55	5,302.25	601.76
Family credit	914.68	625.82	Nil
Severe disablement allowance	828,476.30	1,520,197.28	1,978,326.60
Old cases act benefit	Nil	Nil	Nil
Disability living allowance	2,486,917.53	6,601,000.90	10,823,763.54
Disability working allowance	18,940.81	53,767.19	89,306.95
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	23,894.90	61,817.02	53,128.88

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

[1] These amounts have been reimbursed to the National Insurance Fund. The amounts for all other benefits have been reimbursed to either Votes 1 or 2 of Class XIII Appropriation Accounts.

Private Pensions

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners currently receive private personal pensions; what percentage they comprise of all pensioners; and how many are estimated to receive a personal pension smaller than the level of the basic retirement pension. [3049]

Mr. Heald: Approximately 250,000 or 2.5 per cent. of people over state pension age derive an income from a personal pension. This represents 2.5 per cent. over state pension age. The income from the personal pension was less than the value of the standard rate of state retirement pension for a single person in around 160,000 cases.

Source:

Family Resources Survey 1994–95.

Pensioner Incomes

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of basic retirement pensioners who have a total disposable income in excess of *(a)* twice, *(b)*, three times and *(c)* four times the basic retirement pension. [3052]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

Disposable income of pensioner units

	Level of disposable income		
Pensioner units	*Over two times basic retirement pension*	*Over three times basic retirement pension*	*Over four times basic retirement pension*
Pensioner couples	1,200,000	550,000	300,000
Single pensioners	1,250,000	500,000	200,000
All pensioner units	2,450,000	1,000,000	450,000

Source:

Pensioners' Incomes Series 1993, based mainly upon data from the Family Expenditure Survey 1993.

1. Estimates of numbers have been rounded to the nearest 50,000 pensioner unit. A pensioner unit is defined as being a single person over state pension age, or a couple where the husband is over state pension age. Components may not sum to totals due to rounding.

2 Disposable income has been defined as net income before housing costs for the purposes of this analysis.

3. The level of standard rate basic retirement pension in 1993 was £54.15 for single pensioners and £86.70 for pensioner couples until April, and from then on £56.10 and £89.80 respectively. For pensioner couples, the information in the table is based upon multiples of the couple rate.

4. The estimates given above are calculated from the number of Family Expenditure Survey respondents who at the time of interview had a disposable income in excess of two, three or four times the standard rate basic retirement pension at that time. The calculations do not, therefore, involve deflating prices to July 1993 levels, consequently results are not directly comparable with published pensioners' Incomes Series results.

Lone Parents

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much was spent on benefit for single parent families in (i) 1979, (ii) 1990 and (iii) 1994–95 in equivalent terms. [3093]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is in the table.

	1979–80	*1990–91*	*£ million 1994–95*
Cash	730	4,680	8,884
At 1995–96 prices	1,874	5,574	9,128

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has in respect of the compensation recovery unit. [3383]

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on 7 November, *Official Report*, columns *681–82*.

"Households Below Average Income"

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the next edition of "Households Below Average Income" will be published. [4277]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: "Households Below Average Income: A Statistical Analysis 1979—1993–94" will be published on Thursday 14 November at 9.30 am. Copies will be placed in the Library and made available to Members in the Vote Office.

Benefits Agency Staff

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many Benefits Agency customer services staff there are; and what estimate he has made of the likely change in numbers in the next financial year; [3349]

(2) how many persons worked within his Department's Benefit Agency as customer service staff in the last year for which figures are available. [3345]

Mr. Roger Evans: Information regarding the total number of Benefits Agency customer service staff is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Information regarding the number of district information officers is available only for 1995–96; approximately 450 were employed.

Local Offices (Hampshire)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the performance targets for each social security office in Hampshire for *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97; and how many of these targets were achieved in 1995–96 in each case indicating how these targets and achievements relate to those set nationally. [3355]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

The tables provide performance targets and achievement covering the Benefits, Child Support and Contributions Agencies. Only the Benefits Agency has individual targets for offices within Hampshire.

Benefits Agency—Secretary of State targets

Target area	*1995–96 target—National and district*	*1996–97 target—National*	*1996–97 target—District*
Income support claims (p)	63 per cent. in 5 days	63 per cent. in 5 days	63 per cent. in 5 days
Income support claims (s)	87 per cent. in 13 days	87 per cent. in 13 days	87 per cent in 13 days
Incapacity benefit claims (p)	65 per cent. in 10 days	65 per cent. in 10 days	65 per cent. in 10 days
Incapacity benefit claims (s)	85 per cent. in 30 days	85 per cent. in 30 days	85 per cent. in 30 days
Social fund crisis loans[1]	On the day the need arises	On the day the need arises	On the day the need arises
Income support accuracy	87 per cent.	87 per cent.	76 per cent.[2]
Short term benefit accuracy	94 per cent.	94 per cent.	94 per cent.

[1] Target considered met if 95 per cent. of claims are cleared within one day.
[2] All districts within London South area directorate have been set an income support accuracy improvement target of 76 per cent.
(p) primary target.
(s) secondary target.
1. Hampshire comprises of the Benefits Agency districts of Hampshire North, South, East Hants and WTight and Solent and Forest.

Benefits agency—Secretary of State targets—1995–96 performance against targets

Percentage

Target	*National*	*Hampshire North*	*South East Hants and Wight*	*Solent and Forest*
Income support claims (p)	67.1 per cent.	63.1 per cent.	61.2 per cent.	66.0 per cent.
Income support claims (s)	88.2 per cent.	86.2 per cent.	86.4 per cent.	88.7 per cent.
Incapacity benefit claims	78.9 per cent.	74.3 per cent.	84.0 per cent.	77.5 per cent.
Incapacity benefit claims (s)	96.0 per cent.	92.7 per cent.	96.6 per cent.	96.0 per cent.
Social fund crisis loans	97.4 per cent.	98.4 per cent.	98.3 per cent.	92.9 per cent.
Income support accuracy	78.1 per cent.	71.7 per cent.	69.5 per cent.	80.0 per cent.
Short-term benefit accuracy[1]	90.7 per cent.	86.9 per cent.	—	—

[1] Only Hampshire North was visited by the STB accuracy checking team in 1995–96.
(p) primary target.
(s) secondary target.

Benefits agency—Secretary of State financial targets 1995–96 and 1996–97 and performance against targets 1995–96

	Target/achievement	National £	Hampshire North £	South East Hants and Wight £	Solent and Forest £
Social fund recovery	1995–96 target	273 million	1.16 million	2.30 million	2.22 million
	1995–96 achievement	263.5 million	1.11 million	2.21 million	2.03 million
	1996–97 target	278 million	1.26 million	2.26 million	2.14 million
Social fund expenditure[1]	1995–96 target	406 million	1.73 million	3.24 million	2.98 million
	1995–96 achievement	401 million	1.70 million	3.24 million	2.86 million
	1996–97 target	440 million	1.82 million	3.59 million	3.09 million
Benefit savings (fraud)	1995–96 target[2]	680 million	—[3]	—	—
	1995–96 achievement	715.6 million	—[3]	—	—
	1996–97 target	—	—[3]	—	—
Overpayments	1995–96 target	110 million	—[4]	—	—
	1995–96 achievement	122 million	—[4]	—	—
	1996–97 target	91.5 million	343,000	632,000	627,000

[1] The Social Fund expenditure target is "to keep to the cash limit agreement with Treasury for the discretionary social fund budget approved by Parliament".
[2] From 1996–97 benefit savings (fraud) are included in the new security target.
[3] No. 1995–96 or 1996–97 target or performance data available at district level.
[4] No overpayment recovery target or performance data available at district level in 1995–96.

Contributions agency—1995–96 Secretary of State target and performance against targets

1995–96	Class 1 survey—yield identified Target	Class 1 survey—yield identified Achieved	Number of class 1 and educational surveys Target	Number of class 1 and educational surveys Achieved
Southhampton	904,400	1,229,383	829	560
Portsmouth	1,123,200	593,653	934	1,109
Fareham	567,800	391,630	384	470
Aldershot	759,600	825,026	655	586
National	133 million	151.7 million	116,500	123,308

1995–96	Collectable class 2 identified Target	Collectable class 2 identified Achieved	Customer inquiries Target (per cent.)	Customer inquiries Achieved (per cent.)
Southampton	314	160	95.0	100.0
Portsmouth	379	429	95.0	91.5
Fareham	152	143	95.0	100.0
Aldershot	217	188	95.0	100.0
National	40,000	39,791	95.0	93.8

Contributions agency—1996–97 Secretary of State targets

1996–97	Class 1 survey—yield identified Target £	Collectable class 2 identified Target	Customer inquiries Target (per cent.)
Portsmouth	1,179,648	544	95
Southampton	1,277,952	589	95
National	150 million	40,000	95

1. In April 1995 Hampshire division consisted of four parent offices—Southampton, Portsmouth, Fareham and Aldershot.
2. In October 1995 regions replaced divisions. Hampshire division was split between South and West and South East regions. Aldershot and Basingstoke became part of South East region, while the other areas formed a part of the South and West.
3. Within Hampshire in 1996–97, targets have been set individually for Portsmouth and Southampton only.

Child support agency—Secretary of State targets 1995–96 and 1996–97 and performance against targets 1995–96:

1995–96 national target	1995–96 national achievement	1996–97 national target
£300 million to be collected, or arranged for direct payment from absent parent to parent with care in 1995–96.	£301.5	A band of £380 million to £400 million of maintenance to be collected by the agency or arranged for payment direct from absent parent to parent with care.

Child support agency—Secretary of State targets 1995–96 and 1996–97 and performance against targets 1995–96:

1995–96 national target	1995–96 national achievement	1996–97 national target
90 per cent. of payments to be made to the parent with care within 10 working days of receipt from the absent parent.	97 per cent.	95 per cent. of payments madeto parents with care to be made within 10 working days of a receipt from an absent parent.

Child support agency—Secretary of State targets 1995–96 and 1996–97 and performance against targets 1995–96:

1995–96 national target	*1995–96 national achievement*	*1996–97 national target*
To achieve rapid and continuing improvement in accuracy so that in at least 75 per cent. of cases checked in March, the cash value will be correct.	79 per cent.	To achieve a continuing improvement in accuracy so that at least 85 per cent. of cases checked during March the cash value of the assessment will be correct.
Where the client is dissatisfied with a CSO's decision and requests a review, 50 per cent. to be cleared within 13 weeks; 80 per cent. within 26 weeks and no more than 20 per cent. to be older than 26 weeks at 31 March 1996.	52 per cent. within 13 weeks 71 per cent. within 26 weeks 27 per cent. over 26 weeks	Where the client is dissatisfied with a CSO's decision and requests a review, 55 per cent. to be cleared within 13 weeks; 80 per cent. within 26 weeks and no more than 15 per cent. to be older than 26 weeks at 31 March 1997.
60 per cent. of new maintenance applications to be cleared within 26 weeks and at 31 March 1996 no more than 10 per cent. of all maintenance applications received by the agency to be over 52 weeks old.	48 per cent. within 26 weeks 15 per cent. over 52 weeks old	60 per cent. of new maintenance applications to be cleared within 26 weeks and at 31 March 1997 no more than 10 per cent. of all maintenance applications received by the agency to be over 52 weeks old.
To manage the agency's resources to deliver its business plan within the gross vote budget allocation.	£194 million	Not a Secretary of State target this year
A score of 65 per cent. on an index of client satisfaction as determined by an independent national survey.	45 per cent.	Not a Secretary of State target this year.

Note:

Hampshire offices are dealt with by the Plymouth Child Support Agency centre, but separate performance figures for those offices are not collected.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of people who have suffered a reduction in related earnings allowance with the introduction of the retirement allowance in each Benefits Agency office in Hampshire. [3354]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Social Fund

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the policies governing advice for social fund applications undertaken by the Benefits Agency. [3352]

Mr. Roger Evans: Section 140 of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 requires that

"A social fund officer shall determine any question in accordance with any general directions issued by the Secretary of State and in determining any question shall take account of any general guidance issued by him."

That guidance is contained in the social fund guide and is intended to explain the basis for social fund officers' powers to determine applications to the discretionary social fund and to help them interpret the Secretary of State's directions in a consistent and flexible way.

Section 140 also requires social fund officers to take account of any guidance issued by the social fund officer nominated for his area under section 64 of the Administration Act 1992. This local guidance concerns the level of priority of applications which can be met from the district budget.

Regionalised Benefit Rates

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to regionalise benefit rates; and if he will make a statement. [3263]

Mr. Roger Evans: None. Regional benefit rates would be complex and expensive to administer.

Computer System

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on progress with the installation of the NIRS 2 computer system; and for what reasons Andersen Consulting will not have the system fully operational in February 1997. [3264]

Mr. Heald: Progress on the development of the NIRS 2 computer system is currently proceeding in accordance with the contractual timetable. Under the contract with Andersen Consulting it was always the intention that the system would be fully operational by April 1999. This is still the planned date for NIRS 2 to be fully operational.

Claimant Entitlement Decisions

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what plans he has to restrict support for departmental employees in establishing claimants' benefit entitlements; [3341]

(2) what plans he has to remove independent adjudication of claims from the social security system; [3342]

(3) what proposals he has to change current regulations governing claimants' rights and service levels. [3344]

Mr. Roger Evans: Full details of the Government's proposals for new decision making and appeals processes are set out in the Green Paper, "Improving decision making and appeals in Social Security", Cm 3328, which was published on July 23. The Green Paper was issued to a wide range of organisations with an interest in social security matters. Comments on the proposals were invited by 18 October.

The responses received—around 440—are currently being independently analysed. We plan to publish the results of the consultation exercise early in the new year

and we will ensure that a copy is placed in the Library. Final decisions on the best way forward will be taken in the light of all the representations received.

Privatisation

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his Department's proposals for privatisation in the social security system. [3343]

Mr. Roger Evans: There are no proposals for privatisation of the social security system.

Involvement of the private sector in the Department of Social Security is part of a wider programme of change to reduce running costs and improve efficiency.

Correspondence

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when a reply will be sent to the letter from the hon. Member for Rochdale to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State dated 22 August, relating to Mr. R. Marsh of 43 Haslam street, Rochdale, Lancashire. [3786]

Mr. Roger Evans: I replied to the hon. Member on 23 October.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

School Discipline

19. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received regarding measures relating to school discipline in the Education Bill. [2089]

Mr. Forth: While preparing the legislation, we have received a large number of representations from head teacher and teacher organisations, local authorities, school governors and other bodies with an interest in promoting good behaviour and effective discipline in schools.

21. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to improve school discipline. [2091]

Mr. Forth: The Education Bill introduced on 30 October includes a package of measures to strengthen schools' ability to take action in the face of poor behaviour and discipline; to help ensure there is proper support for schools in dealing with pupils with behavioural problems; and to promote effective provision for such pupils out of school where necessary.

Education Funding (Staffordshire)

20. **Mr. Stevenson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she last met the chief education officer of Staffordshire county council to discuss the level of education funding; and if she will make a statement. [2090]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend met Dr. Hunter, the chief education officer of Staffordshire, on 4 November. They discussed a number of issues concerning education in Staffordshire.

Primary School Class Sizes

22. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make it her policy to reduce primary school class sizes. [2092]

Mr. Robin Squire: It is the Government's policy to allow local authorities to determine the distribution of available resources between their primary and secondary schools; and to allow governors and head teachers to manage the distribution among classes of pupils, teachers and support staff.

Teaching Unions (Meetings)

24. **Mr. Richards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will review the practice of teaching union representatives attending meetings during schools hours. [2094]

Mr. Forth: This is a matter for local management in the light of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service code of practice on time off for trade union duties and activities.

Lostwithiel Primary School

25. **Sir Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she will make a decision on Cornwall local education authority's application for funding to assist with the cost of the Lostwithiel county primary school rebuilding programme; and if she will make a statement. [2095]

Mrs. Gillan: All local education authorities' bids for capital funding under annual capital guidelines and for grant aid for projects at voluntary aided schools, are currently being assessed. Decisions will be announced shortly before Christmas.

Standard Spending Assessments

26. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to change the SSA calculations for local education authorities. [2096]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will make a statement on the SSA methodology for 1997–98 shortly after the Budget.

Mr. Biffen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment by what means, and by what date, she will ensure the details of the education standard spending assessments for 1997–98 will be available to hon. Members. [3510]

Mr. Squire *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will be making a statement shortly after the Budget. Written details of the education standard spending assessments for local authorities in 1997–98, together with details of the SSAs for the other major services, will be available at that time.

Higher and Further Education Institutions

27. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* higher education institutions and *(b)* further education institutions currently do not have cash reserves to cover 30 days of total expenditure. [2097]

Mr. Forth: Eighty-eight higher education institutions did not have net cash balances sufficient to cover 30 days' expenditure at 31 July 1995. At the same date, 128 further education institutions had less than 30 days' cash in hand.

Pupil Exclusions

28. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils have been excluded from secondary schools in England in the last 12 months. [2098]

Mr. Forth: The latest figures on exclusions, which relate to the school year 1994–95, show that 8,870 pupils were permanently excluded from secondary schools in England.

School Funding

29. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to review the allocation of resources to schools which under-perform. [2099]

Mr. Robin Squire: None.

Unemployment (East London)

30. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the percentage of unemployment for *(a)* men and *(b)* women in Ilford, South in November 1990; what it is currently; and what plans she has to introduce further measures to reduce unemployment in east London. [2100]

Mr. Forth: Claimant unemployment rates are not available at constituency level. Claimant unemployment figures for Ilford, South in November 1990 was 1,633 men and 606 women. In September 1996 the figures were 3,251 and 1,126, respectively.

However, I am pleased to say that unemployment in both south Ilford and east London is falling in line with national trends. Unemployment in south Ilford fell from a peak of 5,403 in August 1993 to 4,377 in September 1996. Similarly, unemployment in east London fell from a peak of 55,709 in April 1993 to 41,029 in September 1996.

In east London, as elsewhere, the Employment Service and the training and enterprise councils will continue to deliver a wide range of programmes to help people find the best and quickest route back to employment. In particular, on 7 November I announced plans to extend the project work pilots to a number of areas across the country, including a large part of east and north-east London, which includes south Ilford.

Claimant Register

31. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the reasons for which people have left the claimant register over the last year. [2101]

Mr. Forth: Of those leaving claimant unemployment with a known destination, around 70 per cent. do so because they have found work.

School Commendations

32. **Mr. Alison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many grant-maintained and local education authority schools won Office for Standards in Education commendations for excellence in the most recent year for which information is available. [2102]

Mr. Robin Squire: Of the 203 schools commended by the chief inspector in his 1994–95 annual report, 39 or 19 per cent. are grant-maintained and 162 are maintained by local education authorities; one is a city technology college and one is an independent special school. This contrasts with the underlying proportion of GM schools, compared with the rest of the state sector, of 5 per cent.

High-tech Businesses

33. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent consultations she has had on the training requirements of new high-tech businesses. [2103]

Mr. Paice: The Department provides support to industry training organisations and training and enterprise councils, which enables them to monitor and address training requirements including those related to new high-tech businesses.

Youth Unemployment

34. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for education and Employment what plans she has to introduce measures to reduce unemployment among 16 to 18-year-olds. [2104]

Mr. Forth: The Government will continue with policies to improve standards of education and training and create a flexible and deregulated labour market which have already delivered one of the lowest rates of youth unemployment in Europe. In particular, we shall continue to resist the imposition of policies such as the social chapter and the national minimum wage, which would destroy jobs and create youth unemployment at levels seen in France and Spain where those policies are in place and where youth unemployment stands at 29 per cent. and 39 per cent. respectively.

Unemployment Trends

35. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on trends in unemployment levels over the last year. [2105]

Mr. Forth: The United Kingdom started 1996 with unemployment lower than any other major European country and with unemployment falling at an underlying rate averaging around 10,000 per month. During the

course of the year the labour market has continued to improve and the Office for National Statistics estimates that the underlying rate at which unemployment is falling now averages around 15,000 to 20,000 per month.

Workplace Training

36. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on policies to encourage workplace training schemes. [2106]

Mr. Paice: Employers must take the lead on workplace training. The Government's policy encourages them to look upon training as an investment by demonstrating the business benefits enjoyed by employers who invest effectively in training. Training and enterprise councils are working with employers in a variety of ways to help them address and manage their training needs. Our approach is working, recent surveys show that there has been a considerable increase in the number of employees receiving training in recent years.

The investors in people standard is helping employers to make their training investment effective by linking the training and development needs of their work force directly with the achievement of business goals. Almost 25,000 employers are committed to the standard, of which 4,330 are already recognised as investors in people.

European Social Fund

37. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to secure accelerated payments to qualifying organisations under the European social fund. [2107]

Mr. Paice: Payments of claims relating to approved European social fund projects cannot begin until the money arrives from the European Commission. Thereafter payment is made as soon as possible.

Training (Young People)

38. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to extend training opportunities for those aged under 25 years. [2108]

Mr. Paice: The Government have consulted widely concerning the introduction of national traineeships and access and support strategies for 14 to 19-year-olds as recommended in Sir Ron Dearing's report on 16 to 19 qualifications. Details of the Government's plans for these new initiatives will be published in a White Paper in December. Modern apprenticeships continue to expand with over 41,500 young people starting training in 60 industry sectors.

Nursery Vouchers

39. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much she plans to spend on publicity for the national implementation of the nursery voucher scheme. [2109]

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer the hon. Member to the oral answer that I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig).

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will assess the impact of the jobseeker's allowance on rural areas. [2082]

Mr. Paice: We have commissioned a full evaluation of JSA policy from the centre for research in social policy at Loughborough university. The Employment Service itself will be carrying out local monitoring of delivery.

Home-school Contracts

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received on the introduction of home-school contracts for all schools. [2093]

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Member to oral answer that my right hon. Friend gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy).

Schools (Selection Applications)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many grant-maintained schools have *(a)* applied and *(b)* been approved to select up to 15 per cent. of their intake; and if she will name each such school and the selection criteria agreed. [2755]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table lists the 43 grant-maintained schools which received approval to select up to 10 per cent. of their pupils on the basis of ability or aptitude in certain specified subjects between January 1989 and September 1996. Grant-maintained schools have not since then been required to obtain approval for changes to their admission arrangements which do not require the publication of statutory proposals. Circular 6/69, "Admissions to Maintained Schools", takes the view that admission authorities may select up to 15 per cent. of a school intake in any subject, or by general ability, without the need to publish statutory proposals.

School	*LEA area*	*Nature of change*	*Date approved*
Abbs Cross school	Havering	10 per cent. music	June 1993
Beaverwood girls school	Bromley	10 per cent. performing arts (music and dance)	August 1994
Beverley school	Kingston upon Thames	10 per cent. art or music	October 1994
Bishop's Stortford school	Hertfordshire	10 per cent. music, sport or drama	October 1993
Canterbury high school	Kent	10 per cent. music	April 1993
Cardinal Vaughan Memorial school	Kensington and Chelsea	10 per cent. music	August 1994
Chancellor's school	Hertfordshire	10 per cent music, drama or sport	December 1993
Charles Dickens high school	Kent	10 per cent. music	February 1993
Chatham grammar school for girls	Kent	10 per cent. music, sport or drama	August 1995
Chaucer Technology school	Kent	10 per cent. technology	December 1993

School	*LEA area*	*Nature of change*	*Date approved*
Cliff Park high school	Norfolk	10 per cent. music	October 1994
Cooper's school	Bromley	10 per cent. music, drama, Dance or sport	June 1993
Crofton school	Hampshire	5 places music	October 1994
Dame Alice Owen school	Hertfordshire	10 per cent. music or sport	April 1993
Dane Court Grammar school	Kent	10 per cent. music, sport, drama or any unusual talent	March 1994
Deacons school	Cambridgeshire	10 per cent. technology	August 1994
Dunrave school	Lambeth	10 per cent. music	October 1993
Enfield grammar school	Enfield	10 per cent. music or sport	December 1993
Goffs school	Hertfordshire	10 per cent. music, drama, sport or languages	October 1995
Heathside school	Surrey	10 per cent. music or sport	July 1993
Hendon school	Barnet	10 per cent. music	November 1995
Hertfordshire and Essex high school	Hertfordshire	10 per cent. music, sport or drama	March 1994
Hinchley Wood school	Surrey	10 per cent. music	July 1995
Kemnal Manor school	Bromley	10 per cent. technology	February 1994
King Edward VI grammar school	Essex	Three places for choristers	June 1993
Kings' school	Cambridgeshire	10 per cent. music and choristers	October 1993
La Retraite school	Lambeth	10 per cent. music	September 1993
La Sainte Union convent school	Camden	10 per cent. music	September 1995
Langley Park school for boys	Kent	10 per cent. music or sport	September 1993
Leventhorpe school	Hertfordshire	10 per cent. music	October 1995
Lincoln Christ's Hospital school	Lincolnshire	10 per cent. music	October 1994
Mill Hill county school	Barnet	10 per cent. music	October 1993
Queen's school	Hertfordshire	10 per cent. music, art or sport	March 1993
Rainham Mark grammar school	Kent	10 per cent. music, sport, drama or any unusual talent	February 1992
Rainsford high school	Essex	10 per cent. music or drama	March 1994
Robert Napier school	Kent	10 per cent. music, sport, drama or any unusual talent	February 1992
St. Anne's convent school	Hampshire	10 per cent. music	January 1996
St. George's CE school	Kent	10 per cent. music	July 1995
Thamesmead school	Surrey	10 per cent. music	October 1994
Ursuline convent school	Essex	10 per cent. music	December 1993
Westland high school	Kent	10 per cent. music	January 1993
Winston Churchill school	Surrey	6 per cent. music	October 1995
Wymondham college	Norfolk	10 per cent. music	March 1995

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what regulations her Department proposes to repeal by the end of 1996; if she proposes to conduct a compliance cost assessment on each regulation repealed; and what is the estimated cost of undertaking a compliance cost assessment to determine the advantages or disadvantages of each such a repeal. [3202]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* It is proposed to revoke the Education (Transfer of Functions Relating to Grant-maintained Schools) Order 1996, SI 1996/2247, and to make a fresh order with technical amendments. No compliance cost is involved. The effect of the order is to transfer the function in relation to the consent to borrowing by grant-maintained schools in England from the Secretary of State to the Funding Agency for Schools.

Travel-to-work Funding

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assistance is available to a person who lacks funds to travel to work in respect of a job opportunity verified by the local office of her Department. [3628]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Peter Griffiths, dated 12 November 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the payment of fares to travel to work. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

While there are no schemes set up specifically to provide assistance with travel costs upon finding employment, Jobseekers who have been unemployed for two years or more may be entitled to claim the Jobfinder's Grant.

The purpose of the Grant is to encourage people to look for work by overcoming some of the barriers associated with the transition from benefits into employment.

Ongoing research has indicated that over 70% of Grant recipients cited the need to travel to work as one of the problems they had faced.

In addition, we have been running the Travel to Interview Scheme for a number of years to help unemployed people cope with the expense of getting to job interviews. The scheme does this by helping people who have been unemployed more than 13 weeks with travelling costs, and if necessary, overnight accommodation costs to attend job interviews outside their usual travel to work area. A few basic conditions must be met before assistance can be granted, to ensure the scheme is properly and fairly administered and gives good value for money. In the last year the scheme has helped nearly 47,000 applicants with travelling costs totalling £1.7m.

We also provide extra help for disabled people. People with disabilities can be given help with travel costs to attend job interviews and, if necessary, the travel costs of someone to accompany them, through our specialist Placing Assessment and Counselling Teams (PACTs). In addition, once a job has been

secured, the Access to Work programme can provide help with the additional costs, resulting from disability, of getting to and from work.

I hope this is helpful.

Religious Education

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many secondary schools *(a)* have a member of staff specialising in religious education and *(b)* have no such member of staff. [3626]

Mr. Forth: The Department does not collect detailed information about the deployment of teachers in individual schools. However, the 1992 secondary school staffing survey indicated that over 90 per cent. of schools had at least one teacher with an RE qualification.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many teachers in training for secondary school posts are specialising in religious education. [3625]

Mr. Forth: In 1995–96, 494 students entered courses of initial teacher training in which religious eduction was either the main or second subject.

Secondary Schools (Unacceptable Placements)

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many secondary school age pupils are at present being kept at home because local education authorities have not offered placements acceptable to the parents. [3627]

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not collected centrally.

Teachers (Warwickshire)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many full-time equivalent teachers were employed in Warwickshire; and what was the pupil-teacher ratio in each year since 1991–92. [3511]

Mr. Forth: The number of full-time equivalent teachers employed in the maintained nursery, primary and secondary sector, including grant-maintained schools, and the overall pupil-teacher ratio, for the Warwickshire local education authority area are shown in the table.

Position in January each year

Warwickshire LEA area	*FTE teacher numbers*[1]	*Overall PTR*
1992	3,904	17.8
1993	3,961	17.8
1994[2]	4,017	17.7
1995[2]	4,027	18.0
1996[2]	3,875	18.9

[1] Excluding FTE teachers in special education and education elsewhere.

[2] Excluding sixth form colleges from 1994 onwards.

Pupils (Unit Costs)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proposals she has to publish the unit costs of pupils in primary and secondary schools in all local education authority areas in England for 1995–96. [3828]

Mr. Robin Squire: Provisional aggregate outturn expenditure per pupil for all LEA-maintained pre-primary, primary and secondary schools for 1995–96 will be published in the Department's annual report in March 1997. Data for individual LEAs should be available shortly thereafter.

Higher Education Staff

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to establish a pay review body for staff employed in higher education establishments. [3687]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has no such plans at present.

EDS Ltd.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many contracts her Department, agencies and associated bodies have had with EDS for each year since 1985; what was the value of each contract; if she will indicate for each contract *(a)* if it was completed, *(b)* what modifications were made at the request of (i) the company and (ii) the Department and *(c)* if work under contract is being undertaken in-house; and if she will make a statement on the number of job reductions in her Department arising from the contracting out of work to EDS. [3795]

Mr. Robin Squire: Both the Department for Education and Employment and the Employment Service have recently signed contracts with EDS for access to the Government catalogue framework agreement for the supply of IT goods and services. EDS operates the catalogue on behalf of the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency. No modifications have been made to this contract.

The Student Loans Company entered into a contract with EDS for software to support its lending operations in 1989. In 1990, at the suggestion of EDS, the contract was extended to include the provision of loan repayment software. The total value of the contract was £3 million per annum. Early in 1993, the SLC signed a revised contract with EDS which transferred ownership of the software lending system to the SLC. In 1995 the contract ended.

There are no other contracts between the Department or its agencies and EDS. I am not aware of any further contracts between the Department's associated bodies and EDS.

There have been no job reductions in the Department, its agencies and associated bodies as a result of contracting out work to EDS.

Corporal Punishment

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will undertake a public consultation exercise on the value of corporal punishment in schools; and if she will make a statement. [2428]

Mr. Forth: No. Corporal punishment is an issue which gives rise to a wide range of sincerely held views. However, the Government's view is that its reintroduction would not solve problems of indiscipline in schools.

Teachers' Superannuation Scheme

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many requests for information the teachers' superannuation scheme has received from pension transfers and opt-outs; in how many cases all appropriate information has been supplied; what is the average length of time taken to supply such information; and what moratorium has been introduced on supplying such information. [3346]

Mrs. Gillan: Approximately 7,000 requests for information have been received in respect of members of the teachers' superannuation scheme for England and Wales. Responses have been issued in more than 1,000 cases. The average time taken to deal with priority cases is between three and four weeks. The Teachers' Pensions agencies which administers the teachers' superannuation scheme, was unable to deal with requests for information until 1 October when regulations came into force which enable it to provide and charge for information and process re-instalments.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many independent schools receiving funds from the assisted places scheme publish full accounts which are publicly available; and if she will list them. [3397]

Mrs. Gillan: All 355 schools participating in the assisted places scheme in England are conducted for charitable purposes, as required by section 479 of the Education Act 1996. Copies of their accounts are lodged with the Charity Commission and are publicly available.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils benefiting from the assisted places scheme have been (i) temporarily and (ii) permanently excluded from their school in each of the past five years. [3398]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is not collected centrally. Where an assisted pupil is expelled from a participating school, assistance under the scheme ceases from the date of expulsion.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what checks are carried out by her Department of the administration by individual schools of applications under the assisted places scheme; and *(a)* how many random audit checks have been made to ensure parental assessments have been carried out, *(b)* how many of the random checks uncovered shortcomings in the school's administration and *(c)* what action was taken against schools where shortcomings were found in each of the past five years. [3399]

Mrs. Gillan: All schools' claims for fee remission are audited by independent auditors who have to be satisfied that the claims have been prepared in accordance with the regulations governing the scheme and are in agreement with the schools' own financial records. The auditors are expected to check a sample of the parental income assessments carried out by the school.

In addition, the Department carries out an annual audit survey on a random sample of participating schools to monitor their administration of the scheme, particularly with regard to their assessments of parental income. These surveys have identified a small proportion of cases with shortcomings which are drawn to the attention of the individual schools concerned in the sample and corrective action taken. After each survey, guidance is also issued to all schools in the scheme on the survey's findings to strengthen their administration.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools receiving funds from the assisted places scheme have had a full Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools or Office for Standards in Education inspection in the past five years. [3400]

Mrs. Gillan: All participating schools are covered in the cycle of independent school inspections carried out by Ofsted and the great majority have been visited by HMI in the past five years.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils have benefited from the assisted places scheme in each of the past five years; and what were total funds *(a)* allocated and *(b)* spent in each year. [3401]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is given in the report of the Department for Education and Employment, Cm 3210, published in March 1996, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many parents claiming funds under the assisted places scheme were *(a)* self employed and *(b)* unemployed in each of the past five years. [3402]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what checks her Department makes on schools which apply to receive pupils under the assisted places scheme. [3403]

Mrs. Gillan: Under section 479 of the Education Act 1996, the Secretary of State must have regard to the desirability of securing an equitable distribution of assisted places geographically and between boys and girls. Schools applying for admission to the scheme must be finally registered with the Department and conducted for charitable purposes only, and must satisfy stringent published criteria relating to the breadth and balance of their curriculum, the academic achievements of their pupils and the quality of their teaching staff. Information about the educational opportunities available, their intake policy and financial viability is also taken into account.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the independent schools which received funds from the assisted places scheme with, for each school *(a)* the number of pupils benefiting from the scheme and *(b)* the amount of money received in each of the past five years. [3404]

Mrs. Gillan: A copy of the relevant tables for the academic years 1991–92 to 1995–96 has been deposited in the Library of the House.

Jobcentres

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the number and location of jobcentres in each Scottish local authority area. [3699]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. James Wallace, dated 12 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your question about the number and location of Jobcentres in each Scottish local authority area. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

I can confirm that there are currently 132 Jobcentres in Scotland. For ease of reference I have attached as Annex 1 a detailed list of all Jobcentres and the corresponding local authority.

I hope this is helpful.

Unitary authority areas	*Jobcentres*
Aberdeen, City of	Aberdeen Thistle Street and St. Nicholas
Aberdeenshire	Banff, Fraserburgh, Peterhead
Angus	Arbroath, Blairgowrie, Montrose
Argyll and Bute	Campbeltown, Dunoon, Helensburgh, Lochgilphead, Oban, Rothesay
Ayrshire, East	Cumnock, Kilmarnock A and B
Ayrshire, North	Irvine, Kilbirnie, Kilwinning, Largs, Saltcoats
Ayrshire, South	Ayr, Troon, Girvan
Clackmannanshire	Alloa
Dumfries and Galloway	Annan, Dumfries, Lockerbie, Castle Douglas, Newton Stewart, Sanquhar, Stranraer
Dunbartonshire, East	Kirkintilloch
Dunbartonshire, West	Alexandria, Clydebank, Dumbarton
Dundee, City	Dundee Wellgate and Gellatly Street
Edinburgh, City of	High Riggs, Torphichen Street, South St. Andrew Street, Leith, Portobello, Wester Hailes
Falkirk	Denny, Falkirk, Grangemouth
Fife	Glenrothes, Inverkeithing, Kirkcaldy, Leven, Cowdenbeath, Dunfermline, Cupar, St. Andrews
Glasgow, City of	Anniesland, Bridgeton, Castlemilk, Drumchapel, Easterhouse, Glasgow City, Glasgow Central, Govan, Hillington, Langside, Laurieston, Maryhill, Parkhead, Partick, Shawlands, Shettleston, South Side, Springburn
Highland	Alness, Invergordon, Thurso, Wick, Fort William, Inverness A and B, Nairn, Dingwall, Portree
Inverclyde	Greenock A and B, Port Glasgow
Lanarkshire, North	Airdrie, Bellshill, Coatbridge, Cumbernauld, Kilsyth, Motherwell, Shotts, Wishaw
Lanarkshire, South	Blantyre, Cambuslang, Carluke, East Kilbride, Hamilton, Lanark, Larkhall, Rutherglen, Uddingston
Lothian, East	Musselburgh, Haddington
Lothian, West	Bathgate, Bo'ness, Broxburn, Livingston
Midlothian	Dalkeith, Loanhead, Peebles, Penicuick
Moray	Buckie, Elgin, Forres
Orkney Islands	Kirkwall
Perth and Kinross	Forfar, Perth
Renfrewshire	Johnstone, Linwood, Renfrew, Paisley
Renfrewshire, East	Barrhead
Scottish Borders	Eyemouth, Galashiels, Hawick, Kelso
Shetland	Lerwick
Stirling	Stirling
Western Isles	Stornoway

Job Vacancy Display Boards

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her policy regarding the location of the job vacancy display boards in libraries, community centres and post offices in Scotland; and what financial contribution has been made by each unitary authority in Scotland towards this service in each of the last three years. [3700]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. James Wallace, dated 12 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your question about the policy on the location of job vacancy display boards in libraries, community centres and post offices in Scotland; and what financial contribution has been made by each unitary local authority in Scotland towards this service in each of the last 3 years. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Through its network of local Jobcentres, The Employment Service in Scotland regularly reviews the provision of job vacancy display boards to libraries, community centres and post offices according to the needs and availability of appropriate venues. The provision of such display boards depends on the local labour market covered and the need to ensure that a system can be put in place to keep vacancies on display up to date. Local authorities do not make a financial contribution to this service.

I hope this is helpful.

Physical Education

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what amount of time primary school pupils are expected to devote to physical eduction each week; and what school facilities her Department assesses are necessary to support this. [4057]

Mrs. Gillan: It is for schools to decide how much time to allocate for the teaching of physical education. In deciding how much time to allocate, schools may wish to bear in mind the recommendation in the Government's 1995 "Raising the Game" policy statement on sport that they should offer two hours a week of physical education and sport in formal lessons.

The Department makes no assessment of the facilities necessary to support physical education teaching; this is a decision for schools.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 14 November 1996

PRIME MINISTER

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to section 4 of the Government's response to the fourth recommendation contained in the second report of the Public Service Committee on ministerial accountability and responsibility, HC 67, Session 1996–97, if he will make it Government policy to answer parliamentary questions relating to events taking place more than 30 years ago. [3886]

The Prime Minister: To the extent that such questions are admissible under the rules of the House—"Erskine May", 21st edition, page 294—Ministers will seek to answer them, as any other question, in accordance with "Questions of Procedures for Ministers".

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 November. [2703]

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 November. [2704]

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Zaire

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the findings contained in the UN report relating to arms smuggling to Rwandan Hutus based in Zaire with particular reference to the role of United Kingdom companies in supplying arms. [3801]

Dr. Liam Fox: Inquiries by HM Customs and Excise, the appropriate investigating authority, undertaken as a result of earlier allegations that United Kingdom companies may have been involved in arms supplies to Rwanda groups, have not produced evidence to support criminal proceedings against any United Kingdom company or individual. HM Customs and Excise are in contact with the United Nations about their report and will provide details in response to appropriate requests.

Montserrat

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received, and what response he has made, in respect of the proposals to build an emergency jetty in the north of Montserrat; and if he will make a statement. [4078]

Dr. Liam Fox: A number of representations were received from residents of Montserrat and others regarding the environmental considerations of building an emergency evacuation jetty in Little bay. As with all such projects, the plans were subjected to an environmental impact study. The results of this were taken into account when the Government of Montserrat's planning authority approved the project on 30 October.

WALES

Planning Guidelines

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what assessment his Department has made of the advantages of giving additional weight to environmental impact in determining planning restrictions on agricultural holdings; [3364]

(2) what research his Department has *(a)* planned, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* evaluated into establishing practical criteria for assessing sustainable and low-impact developments, with particular regard to rural areas; and if he will make a statement; [3269]

(3) what assessment his Department has made of the capacity of the planning system to accommodate low impact development; and if he will make a statement; [3358]

(4) what evaluation his Department has made of the capacity of the planning system to absorb a new *(a)* low-impact and *(b)* permaculture use class into existing guidelines; and what assessment he has made of the advantages of this policy; [3369]

(5) what research his Department has *(a)* planned, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* evaluated into the advantages of establishing a permaculture use class within the planning system; and if he will make a statement. [3375]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to review *(a)* PPG7 and *(b)* other planning guidance on agricultural and other dwellings in the countryside in order to give greater weight to environmental and social sustainability; and if he will make a statement. [3378]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The main body of PPG7 has been cancelled in Wales. Planning policy guidance on rural development can be found in "Planning Guidance (Wales): Planning Policy" 1996, which is currently being reviewed. Guidance on agricultural dwellings will be contained in a proposed technical advice note on rural development, which should be issued shortly for public consultation.

Hospitals and Health Trusts (Deficits)

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of hospitals and health trusts facing deficits during the current financial year. [3186]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Latest trust directors of finance monitoring returns, which projects estimated end of year financial positions—as at 30 June for those on quarterly monitoring and 31 August 1996 for those on monthly monitoring—identify six trusts with deficit at year end. Welsh Office officials are currently assessing the mid-year monitoring returns.

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the cost of staff employed full time or part time (i) to provide information and publicity and (ii) to work in press or media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94. [3567]

Mr. Hague: The costs of staff employed in the information division to provide publicity and press services for the Welsh Office were as follows:

£000

Year	*Publicity*	*Press*
1993–96	186	431
1994–95	206	418
1995–96	257	403

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff were employed full time or part time by his Department to provide information and publicity in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94. [3571]

Mr. Hague: The number of staff employed in the information division to provide information and publicity services for the Welsh Office were as follows:

1993–94: 23.5

1994–95: 21.5

1995–96: 23.9

Full-time equivalent

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the cost assumed in his Department's budget for people employed full time or part time to work on the press and the media in 1996–97. [3575]

Mr. Hague: It is £335,000.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was his Department's expenditure on consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94. [3578]

Mr. Hague: Welsh Office expenditure on consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media is as follows:

1993–94: £17,450

1994–95: Nil

1995–96: Nil

Insulin Pen Needles

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the inquiry into the provision of insulin pen needles by the NHS, with particular reference to its implications for Wales. [3806]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: We are currently considering whether insulin injection pen needles should be made available on general practitioner prescription.

Engineering Training

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number in modern apprenticeships in engineering at *(a)* craft, *(b)* technician and *(c)* student levels in (i) Wales and (ii) each region of Wales for which statistics are available. [4138]

Mr. Hague: There is no information available centrally on the number currently participating in modern apprenticeships in engineering. Information from the Department for Education and Employment modern apprenticeship database indicates that the number starting on modern apprenticeships in engineering is as shown in the table:

Starts in modern apprenticeships in engineering[1], 1995–96

TEC area	*Craft related occupations[2]*	*Other occupations[3]*
Gwent	113	16
Mid Glamorgan	139	19
Powys	[4]—	24
North-east Wales	114	[4]—
North-west Wales	[4]—	[4]—
South Glamorgan	n/a	n/a
West Wales	105	71
Wales	494	136

Notes:

[1] Engineering is defined as: engineering manufacturing; air transport; telecommunications; electrical installation; engineering construction; marine engineering and Welsh manufacturing engineering. It excludes other sectors of manufacturing.

[2] Craft and related occupations are defined as: skilled construction; skilled engineering, metal machining and instrument making, electrical and electronic trade; metal forming, welding and related trades; vehicle trades; textiles; printing and woodworking; food preparation, horticulture and other craft occupations.

[3] This includes 14 in science and engineering associated professions.

Source:

Department for Education and Employment modern apprenticeship database.

[4] Indicates figures which cannot be given for reasons of confidentiality or reliability.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the Engineering Council for Wales concerning increasing the status of engineering among school leavers, school teachers and parents in Wales. [4132]

Mr. Hague: None, but from reports of routine contacts between my officials and the Engineering Centre for Wales I know that the centre's new executive chairman shares my keenness to raise the profile of engineering as a career choice for school leavers.

I understand that the centre is re-examining its strategies for achieving this, seeking to build upon existing links with the education business partnerships. It will also be a key player in Wales in helping to promote 1997 as the Year of Engineering Success—YES.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairmen of the boards of governors of university of Wales institutes at Cardiff and Newport, the chairmen of South Glamorgan and Gwent training and enterprise councils, and the chairman of the Higher Education Funding Council Wales in relation to the training and education of skilled and qualified engineers in south-east Wales. [4155]

Mr. Hague: The supply of skilled and qualified people for the manufacturing sector is a key priority in "People and Prosperity: an Agenda for Action in Wales" and, as such, features regularly in discussions which I and my Department hold with training and enterprise councils and the Welsh funding councils. I have asked the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales to give priority to science and technology courses and I met the chairman of the council last month to discuss progress. I shall be meeting the chairman of the Council for Welsh TECs on 18 November to discuss skills supply in manufacturing.

South-East Wales Ambulance Trust

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the previous chairman of the South East Wales Ambulance Trust concerning the conclusions in relation to both value for money and regularity and propriety contained within the district auditor's reports of 11 November. [4156]

Mr. Hague: None.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the South East Wales Ambulance Trust regarding the contents of the district auditor's reports of 11 November, what proposals he has for ensuring the return of *(a)* the performance-related pay bonuses paid, *(b)* the cost of the camperwagon converted at public expense and *(c)* other trust funds diverted into private hands via the credit cards and fuel cards; and if he will make a statement. [4153]

Mr. Hague: None. My officials are continuing to monitor progress at the South East Wales Ambulance Trust and are receiving regular reports on issues raised by the district auditor. The trust has taken legal advice and, where appropriate, is doing all within its power to recover losses incurred.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the environment directorate of the European Commission concerning the complaint in relation to the Cardiff bay barrage. [4136]

Mr. Hague: None.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what independent legal advice he has sought on the implications of the Lappel bank judgment on the Cardiff bay barrage. [4135]

Mr. Hague: It is not my practice to disclose the nature of the legal advice I receive.

DEFENCE

Bosnia

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the British bases established as part of the IFOR operation in *(a)* Bosnia and *(b)* Croatia; and how much Britain is charged for these bases to be situated in each of these areas. [4058]

Mr. Soames: The British bases established as part of NATO's implementation force operation in Croatia and Bosnia, and the charges agreed for their occupation, are as follows:

	Monthly charge £
Location—Croatia	
Split—Divulje barracks	No charge
Split—port facilities	117,000
Split—factories and warehouse	224,000
Location—Bosnia	
Tomislavgrad–factory and warehouse	40,000
Lipa	12,000
Kupres	32,000
Gornji Vakuf—3 factories	41,000
Sipovo—3 factories, sawmill and hotel	21,000
Glamoc-sawmill and factory	7,000
Sanski Most—two factories	8,000
Mrkonjic Grad—two factories, sawmill and dam	11,000
Banja Luka—factory and offices	36,000
Vitez-bulk fuel installation and school	11,000
Jajce–factory	6,000
Kljuc-depot	1,000
Bosanski Petrovac-garage	5,000
Krupa—two factories	5,000

Air Crashes

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* dates on which and *(b)* types of aircraft which his Department has lost through crashes in each of the last five years; and what were the causes of these accidents. [4059]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is given in the table.

Date	*Aircraft type*	*Cause*
1992		
12 May	Tucano T1	Aircrew error
12 May	Lynx AH7	Aircrew error
14 February	Hunter T8C	Technical fault
14 May	Harrier GR3	Operating hazard
28 May	Sea Harrier FRS1	Not positively determined
30 May	Viking	Natural hazard
9 July	Buccaneer S2B	Technical fault
9 July	Viking	Aircrew error
7 August	Harrier GR5	Technical fault
30 September	Hawk T1A	Aircrew error
16 October	Bulldog T1	Not positively determined
21 October	Sea King HC4	Aircrew error
26 November	Puma HC1 and Gazelle AH1	Operating hazard
1993		
18 March	Gazelle HT2	Human factors (non-aircrew)
19 May	Chipmunk T10	Aircrew error

Date	Aircraft type	Cause
27 May	Hercules C3	Not positively determined
28 June	Harrier GR7	Natural hazard
1 July	Hawk T1	Aircrew error
20 July	Gazelle AH1	Aircrew error
12 August	Wessex HC2	Technical fault
26 August	Chipmunk T10	Aircrew error
9 September	Gazelle HT3	Aircrew error
17 September	Wessex HC2	Natural hazard
21 October	Tornado F3	Aircrew error
6 November	Sea King HAS6	Technical fault
23 November	Harrier GR7	Technical fault
1994		
6 January	Sea Harrier FA2	Human factors (non-aircrew)
14 January	Harrier GR7	Aircrew error
25 March	Lynx HAS3	Aircrew error
10 April	Lynx AH7	Aircrew error
2 June	Chinook HC2	Aircrew error
7 June	Tornado F3	Technical fault
8 July	Tornado F3	Aircrew error
19 July	Tornado GR1	Technical fault
1 August	Tornado GR1	Under investigation
1 September	Tornado GR1A	Not positively determined
19 September	Tornado GR1A	Technical fault
22 September	Lynx AH7	Technical fault
11 November	Gazelle AH1	Aircrew error
15 December	Sea Harrier FRS1	Technical fault
1995		
10 March	Tornado F3	Technical fault
16 May	Nimrod R1	Technical fault
1 June	Harrier GR7	Not positively determined
21 June	Jaguar GR1A	Under investigation
5 August	Viking	Aircrew error
10 August	Hawk T1W	Aircrew error
20 August	Lynx AH7	Aircrew error
27 August	Viking	Aircrew error
2 September	Nimrod MR2	Under investigation
5 October	Gazelle HT2	Aircrew error
30 October	2 x Tornado F3	Under investigation
1996		
10 January	2 x Tornado F3	Under investigation
11 January	Tornado GR1	Under investigation
23 January	Jaguar GR1B	Under investigation
13 February	Sea Harrier F/A2	Under investigation
13 February	Hawk T1	Under investigation
19 February	Harrier GR7	Under investigation
26 February	Harrier T4N	Under investigation
26 February	Tornado GR1	Under investigation
13 May	Tucano T1	Under investigation
26 May	Hawk T1	Under investigation
24 July	Jaguar GR1	Under investigation
18 September	Jaguar T2A	Under investigation
28 September	Tornado F3	Under investigation

Unexploded Bombs

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the precise location of the unexploded bombs in West Ham and East Ham. [4079]

Mr. Soames: The information available to my Department on this subject is obtained from public records. A summary was placed in the Library of the House in response to an earlier question from the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), *Official Report*, column *863*.

Sea Crusader

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the breakdown of the Japanese roll on roll off vessel, Sea Crusader chartered by his Department; when the vessel broke down; how many of its engines have broken down; when the vessel was chartered; what is the vessel's current position; what actions his Department has taken to replace the vessel; and if he will make a statement. [4061]

Mr. Soames: The Japanese-built vessel was the only suitable ro-ro available to meet the requirements of the joint rapid deployment force. Named RFA Sea Crusader, it was chartered on 17 September 1996, is a UK registered vessel and is manned and operated by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. The vessel lost power in its starboard engine on 1 November 1996 while en route to its UK base at Marchwood. This reduced the ship's speed but it continued to carry out its operational duties. The engine fault has now been rectified under guarantee and at no cost to my Department. The vessel is due to arrive in UK waters in late November 1996 as originally planned.

EDS Ltd.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many contracts his Department, agencies and associated bodies have had with EDS for each year since 1985; what was the value of each contract; if he will indicate for each contract *(a)* if it was completed, *(b)* what modifications were made at the request of (i) the company and (ii) the Department and (c) if work under contract is being undertaken in-house; and if he will make a statement on the number of job reductions in his Department arising from the contracting out of work by EDS. [3798]

Mr. Arbuthnot: As the management data held centrally for MoD headquarters contracts branches shows in excess of 150 live contracts and does not include the information required, the answers to this question could be provided only at disproportional cost. In addition, I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 16 October 1995, *Official Report* columns *31–32*.

Where chief executives of my Department's agencies exercise responsibilities for this matter under the terms of their framework documents, I have asked them to write to the hon. Member direct.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 14 November 1996:

I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about contracts with EDS. DERA is a next steps Agency within the Ministry of Defence which, through a predecessor agency, the Defence Research Agency (DRA), has had delegated authority to make contracts since 1991.

Our current contracts records system goes back to 1992, which is when the DRA introduced a new Improved Commercial Accounting System. These records show that DERA currently has 135 contracts with EDS at a total approximate value of £20.5M and 270 completed contracts with a total value of just under £21M. In the time available we have not been able to identify any direct job losses in DERA or its predecessor organisations arising from contracts with EDS.

I am sorry but the remaining information you have asked for could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Letter from J. C. R. Hunt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 14 November 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence and his colleagues about contracts with EDS. I am answering on behalf of the Meterological Office to the extent that the questions fall within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive.

The Meterological Office has let only one contract with EDS in the period in question. It was let in May 1995 and its value was some £27K. The work involved was completed satisfactorily. No modifications to the specified work were called for either by myself or the contractor, there was no in-house involvement and in consequence no job reductions followed.

I hope this gives you the information you need.

Letter from Michael R. Pack to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 14 November 1996:

You recently asked the Secretary of State for Defence a Parliamentary Question about contractual relations between his Department and EDS.

For the Hydrographic Office Defence Agency, the issues raised fall within the responsibilities delegated to the Chief Executive, Rear Admiral J P Clarke. In the normal course of events, Admiral Clarke would reply to you personally. However, he is at present absent from the Office on official duty and I am replying on his behalf.

Before 31 March 1996, contracts were not let by the Hydrographic Office but by the appropriate contract branch within the Ministry of Defence. Since becoming a trading fund on 1 April 1996, two contracts have been placed by the Hydrographic Office with EDS: one small contract to provide training in a software package for the management of geographic data; and a more substantial contract to provide post design services for the document management and geographic management systems themselves. The former is complete; the latter on-going.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Agency Letters

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions *(a)* non-departmental public bodies and *(b)* executive agencies responsible to his Department have provided answers by letter, with copies to the Library but not published in the *Official Report* in each of the latest available two years. [3159]

Mr. Howard: Questions which refer to the work of non-departmental public bodies responsible to my Department are answered by Home Office Ministers and published in the *Official Report*. Replies to questions which are prepared by the chief executives of Home Office agencies are published in the *Official Report*, except on those occasions where there is insufficient time to provide the information requested before the House rises for recess. In such cases, the chief executive gives an undertaking in the *Official Report* to provide an answer by letter, and to place a copy of the letter in the Library. There is no information available on the number of occasions when this procedure has been followed.

Police Dogs

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance his Department issues in respect of the interpretation of "reasonable force" as used in the making of an arrest by the police using police dogs. [3631]

Mr. Maclean: Home Office guidance on the training of police dogs indicates the importance of dog handlers identifying themselves as police officers and giving any person to whom a challenge is directed the opportunity to give themselves up before the dog is instructed to chase and detain, or search for, a person.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what monitoring is conducted by his Department to ensure police forces adhere to his Department's guidelines on the operational use of police dogs; [3630]

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure regional training centres for police dog development adhere to Home Office guidelines on the training of police dogs. [3629]

Mr. Maclean: The training and deployment of police dogs is an operational matter for chief officers.

The operation of police dog units is monitored by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary as part of its inspection procedure.

Illegal Entrants

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will break down the number of illegal entrants to the United Kingdom detected in 1995 in respect of *(a)* nationality, *(b)* the methods of entry into the United Kingdom stating the number in each category, *(c)* the length of time they had been in the United Kingdom before detection and *(d)* the manner in which they were detected, stating the number in each category. [3412]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information on nationality and category is given in tables which have been placed in the Library. The other information requested is either not available or could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Fire Brigades (Health and Safety)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce a joint committee on health and safety under the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council; and if he will make a statement. [3525]

Mr. Sackville: Health and safety issues are currently dealt with in the existing joint committees. A review of the functions, costs and working practice of the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council is in progress. Any changes in the council and sub-committee structure and terms of reference will be considered in the light of its recommendations.

Video Release Certificate

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many films have been refused a video release certificate by the British Board of Film Classification as a result of consideration of the new criteria contained in the Criminal Justice Act 1994; and if he will list their titles. [3539]

Mr. Sackville: The British Board of Film Classification has refused classification certificates to 12 video works since the introduction of the statutory

classification criteria in the Criminal Justice and Public order Act 1994. The following works have been refused a certificate:

Kickboxer 4—The Aggressor;

Back in Action;

Bare Behind Bars;

Sadomania;

Demoniac;

Arrowhead;

Boy Meets Girl;

Schoolgirl Fantasy;

Mikey;

Ultimate Pursuits;

LA Blue Girl;

S & M Why?

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many videos certified for home release have been re-classified as a result of the review by the British Board of Film Classification arising from the change in the law contained in the Criminal Justice Act 1994; and if he will list their titles. [3540]

Mr. Sackville: I understand that the British Board of Film Classification has not reviewed the classification of any video works under the Video Recordings (Review of Determinations) Order 1995, which came into force on 1 November 1995.

Smoke Detectors and Sprinklers

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it compulsory for all retail establishments to be fitted with an appropriate number of smoke detectors and sprinklers. [3434]

Mr. Sackville: No. The need for smoke detectors or sprinklers in any particular retail premises must depend upon the outcome of a fire risk assessment for those premises.

Dog Breeding

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many dog breeding establishments have been inspected by local authorities since the Breeding of Dogs Act 1991 came into force; and how many were inspected in the period 1986 to 1991; [3760]

(2) how many licences have been issued each year since the passing of the Breeding of Dogs Act 1973; and what proportion of applications are refused; [3759]

(3) how many dog breeding establishments have been closed under the Breeding of Dogs Act 1991; and how many offenders have been fined the maximum amount under this legislation; [3771]

(4) what measures are being taken to ensure local authorities are complying with the requirements of the Breeding of Dogs Act 1973. [3773]

Mr. Sackville: Information is not collected centrally about the number of dog breeding establishments inspected by local authorities, the number of licences issued and applications refused, and the number of breeding establishments which have been closed down. So far as we are aware, no offender has been fined the maximum amount under the legislation.

The level of priority given to implementing the provisions of the Breeding of Dogs Acts is a matter for local authorities to determine.

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many dog breeders have been convicted under the Protection of Animals Act 1911 since 1966. [3772]

Mr. Maclean: It is not possible, from the information held centrally, to identify offences specific to dog breeding from other summary offences under the Protection of Animals Act 1911, as amended. In 1995, there were 754 recorded convictions under the Act.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers *(a)* were placed in detention at Saughton or Cornton Vale in 1996 and *(b)* were in detention in each month of 1996, broken down by (i) country of origin, (ii) length of detention and (iii) place of application. [3789]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information on the number of asylum seekers placed to detention at Her Majesty's prison Saughton or the Cornton Vale institute during 1996 is not available.

The requested breakdown of all detained asylum seekers, for selected dates during 1996, is given in the tables.

Table 1: Number of people recorded as being detained[1] who had sought asylum at some stage, by nationality

Nationality	*As at 31 January*	*As at 29 February*	*As at 29 March*	*As at 30 April*	*As at 31 May/ 7 June[2]*
Nigeria	109	108	114	114	105
India	91	84	79	93	96
Algeria	71	66	62	67	72
Sri Lanka	31	29	34	37	38
Ghana	30	31	38	38	52
Pakistan	26	32	27	23	29
Zaire	23	27	30	32	34
Peoples Republic of China	38	32	23	22	26
Turkey	29	23	26	33	39
Angola	13	10	11	11	12
Romania	12	20	17	21	23
Cyprus	3	5	2	4	2
Israel	—	—	—	—	—
Yugoslavia	10	10	5	4	19
Columbia	3	6	4	4	11
Gambia	58	57	51	44	29
Bangladesh	22	14	12	22	17
Liberia	3	2	3	3	5
Poland	6	7	6	6	5
Ethiopia	3	4	2	3	5
Iran	8	8	11	7	13
Jamaica	6	7	4	4	5
Russia	3	2	4	6	5
Ivory Coast	4	3	3	6	6
Sierra Leone	6	5	3	5	5
Tanzania	4	3	9	6	4
Kenya	19	17	11	7	4
Lithuania	8	6	5	8	11
Morocco	3	—	—	—	—
Slovakia	—	—	—	—	—
Sudan	5	3	3	2	2
Uganda	5	7	3	3	5
Ecuador	10	8	5	5	8
Eritrea	2	—	—	—	—
Somalia	7	5	5	6	8
South Africa	2	—	—	3	—

Table 1: Number of people recorded as being detained [1] who had sought asylum at some stage, by nationality

Nationality	As at 31 January	As at 29 February	As at 29 March	As at 30 April	As at 31 May/ 7 June[2]
Afghanistan	6	11	6	7	7
Albania	5	4	7	7	5
Bulgaria	2	2	3	3	2
Congo	2	—	—	—	—
Nationality Doubtful	4	2	4	6	4
Others[3]	41	42	53	53	38
Total	733	702	685	725	751

[1] These figures include people who have been in detention for less than a month. Because of the delay in recording receptions into, and releases from, detention and the large number of persons detained for a short period, the figures should be used with caution.
[2] Port cases are as at 7 June and in-country cases are as at 31 May.
[3] The 'Others' category may include nationalities of detainees already listed.

Nationality	As at 27 June	As at 30 July/ 2 August[1]	As at 4 September	As at 1 October	As at 5 November
Nigeria	106	106	110	112	114
India	101	96	91	95	70
Algeria	75	70	65	63	68
Sri Lanka	43	45	47	48	55
Ghana	52	56	60	58	46
Pakistan	25	35	35	34	44
Zaire	38	43	48	44	43
Peoples Republic of China	32	35	39	44	42
Turkey	35	39	47	42	38
Angola	16	16	18	23	19
Romania	23	33	20	18	19
Cyprus	7	6	12	17	17
Israel	—	—	—	15	15
Yugoslavia	9	6	12	9	15
Columbia	15	11	10	35	14
Gambia	27	16	16	16	14
Bangladesh	18	17	16	18	13
Liberia	4	5	9	7	10
Poland	6	8	6	5	10
Ethiopia	6	8	9	9	9
Iran	11	9	11	13	9
Jamaica	5	8	8	10	9
Russia	6	5	6	8	9
Ivory Coast	6	7	7	6	7
Sierra Leone	6	4	7	8	6
Tanzania	4	4	3	4	6
Kenya	6	4	9	7	5
Lithuania	5	4	4	7	5
Morocco	2	—	—	3	5
Slovakia	—	—	—	—	5
Sudan	3	—	4	4	5
Uganda	4	3	4	8	5
Ecuador	8	6	3	4	4
Eritrea	—	2	2	—	3
Somalia	9	6	6	5	3
South Africa	2	2	—	—	3
Afghanistan	5	6	2	—	2
Albania	3	2	3	2	2
Bulgaria	—	—	2	3	2
Congo	—	2	—	—	2
Nationality Doubtful	6	10	8	11	7
Others[2]	43	41	50	49	29
Total	772	776	809	864	808

[1]Port cases are as at 2 August and in-country cases are as at 30 July.
[2]The "Others" category may include nationalities of detainees already listed.

Table 2: Number of people recorded as being detained who had sought asylum at some stage, by length of detention

Detained as at	0 to 1 Month[1]	1 to 2 Months	2 to 6 Months	12 Months	>12 Months	Total
31 January	194	133	296	97	13	733
29 February	150	119	311	109	13	702
29 March	188	109	284	93	11	685
30 April	181	143	280	106	15	725
31 May/7 June[2]	201	133	287	112	18	751
27 June	214	139	282	113	24	772
30 July/2 August[3]	192	148	311	100	25	776
4 September	211	141	312	115	30	809
1 October	244	154	311	121	34	864
5 November	198	138	314	123	35	808

[1] These figures include people who have been in detention for less than a month. Because of the delay in recording receptions into, and releases from, detention and the large number of persons detained for a short period, the figures should be used with caution.
[2] Port cases are as at 7 June and in-country cases are as at 31 May.
[3] Port cases are as at 21 August and In-country cases are as at 30 July.

Table 3: Number of people recorded as being detained [1] who had sought asylum at some stage, by location of application

Detained as at	Port	In-country	Total
31 January	418	315	733
29 February	406	296	702
29 March	416	269	685
30 April	436	289	725
31 May/7 June[2]	462	289	751
27 June	472	300	772
30 July/2 August[3]	483	293	776
4 September	503	306	809
1 October	543	321	864
5 November	482	326	808

[1] These figures include people who have been in detention for less than a month. Because of the delay in recording receptions into, and releases from, detention and the large number of persons detained for a short period, the figures should be used with caution.
[2] Port cases are as at 7 June and in-country cases are as at 31 May.
[3] Port cases are as at 2 August and in-country cases are as at 30 July.

Handguns

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of *(a)* homicides, *(b)* unlawful woundings and *(c)* accidental injuries notified to the police in which licensed handguns were used in each month since March. [3788]

Mr. Maclean: Information as to whether firearms used in offences are legally held is not at present routinely collected centrally in England and Wales. However, a special exercise has recently been carried out to find out whether the guns used in homicides were licensed. The exercise covers the years 1992 to 1994. Out of a total of 22 homicides in which the firearm was legally held, four involved handguns.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the continuation of section 11 funding. [4208]

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the arrangements for funding under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 for pupil support after March 1997. [4100]

Mr. Kirkhope: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave yesterday to my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason), *Official Report*, column 242.

Sparrow Hall, Liverpool

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received in respect of crime from the Sparrow Hall community council in the Liverpool, West Derby constituency; and what response he has made. [3989]

Mr. Maclean: We have received a letter from Jean Hannah of the Sparrow Hall community council, and a reply was sent on 13 November. I understand that the area commander is developing a community partnership strategy to deal with local crime problems.

Military Corrective Training Centre, Colchester

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the high-intensity regime will open at the MCTC at Colchester; and if he will make a statement on the cause of the delays in opening the centre; [1761]

(2) what Prison Service training the officer who is in charge of the military corrective training centre at Colchester has had since July; what plans there are for further training; and if he will make a statement. [1762]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 November 1996]:* This is a unique initiative, requiring careful preliminary work. Much progress has already been made, and Colchester young offender institution will open when we have agreed the final details of the regime and completed the staff appointments.

By the end of July, the officer in charge of the military corrective training centre had undertaken training in relation to prisoner adjudications and the command of serious incidents, and had made several familiarisation visits to Prison Service establishments. Since July, he has undertaken finance training. Further training is planned on the staff code of discipline and staff appraisal.

TRANSPORT

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the cost of staff employed full time or part time (i) to provide information and publicity and (ii) to work in press or media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94. [3569]

Mr. Bowis: The answers are £1,620,308, £1,491,230 and £1,538,298, respectively.

These figures combine the cost of staff who work on information, publicity, press and media for the Department and its agencies. The split between information, publicity, press and media could be provided only at disproportionate cost. It does not include the work of the public inquiry point, as this work is part of its general administrative duties and is not recorded separately.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the cost assumed in his Department's budget for people employed full time or part time to work on the press and the media in 1996–97; [3577]

(2) what is the cost for staff employed full time or part time by his Department to provide information and publicity in 1996–97. [3573]

Mr. Bowis: The answer is £1,800,347.

This figure includes the cost of staff who work on information, publicity, press and media for the Department and its agencies. The split between press, media and information and publicity could be provided only at disproportionate cost. It does not include the work of the public inquiry unit as this is part of its general administrative duties and is not recorded separately.

Roads Expenditure

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the expenditure on roads in each county expressed as a figure per motor car based on the census figures for car ownership in each of the last 10 years. [2599]

Mr. Watts: This information is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Electric Vehicle Propulsion

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the advantages of subsidising research into electric vehicle propulsion and the installation of recharging facilities in large conurbations; and if he will make a statement. [3194]

Mr. Bowis: There are a number of research projects, such as the Coventry electric vehicle project, recently launched by my right hon. Friend and partly funded by the Energy Savings Trust, which are already assessing the benefits and practicality of electric vehicles in real-life situations. Although electric vehicles have yet to reach the point where they are a clear alternative to more conventional technology as a means of providing a cost-effective solution for urban air quality concerns, a variety of organisations are working to improve the technology and reduce costs. I am keeping this progress under review.

Marine Pollution Control Unit

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the annual expenditure on the marine pollution control unit in each year since it was established. [3638]

Mr. Bowis: I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 14 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Question about expenditure on the Marine Pollution Control Unit since it was established.

The Unit was formed as part of the Department of Trade in 1979. In 1983 it was transferred to the Department of Transport. The computerised finance system however only goes back as far as 1990 when the unit became part of Marine Emergencies Organisation. Records before this time are not readily available. The spend by the Marine Pollution Control Unit since 1990 is as follows:

1990/91: £5,942,544

1991/92: £6,537,070

1992/93: £7,420,454

1993/94: £7,172,959

1994/95: £7,392,677

1995/96: £7,733,406.

These figures include spend on programme costs and running costs. In addition, the MPCU incurred the following costs dealing with pollution incidents:

1990/91: £737,822

1991/92: £42,295

1992/93: £1,114,020

1993/94: £1,934,090

1994/95: £251,755

1995/96: £2,004,872.

Diesel Vehicles

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the advantages of introducing incentives to promote the retro-fitting of emission control devices to diesel vehicles. [3791]

Mr. Bowis: We keep the position under review, taking account of relevant research such as analysis undertaken in the EU auto-oils programme, trials by London Transport buses and related research.

Office of Passenger Rail Franchising

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the latest estimated outturn costs to the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising, including incentive payments for paying *(a)* franchised and *(b)* non-franchised train operators, for the year 1996–97; what was the original budget; and what estimates he has made for subsequent years. [4150]

Mr. Watts: Opraf's original budget for support for passenger rail services provided for the franchise payments to Great Western and South West Trains of £125 million and a budget for BR of £1,692 million, making a total of £1,817 million against the £1,626 million voted in the main supply estimates. The latest estimated outturn is £1,763 million and a winter supplementary estimate for a further £137 million has been announced. The reduction of £54 million against the initial budget is the result of the savings on the 11 franchises let this year and the anticipated savings from later franchises. The split is estimated at payments to BR of £1,329 million and to franchisees of £434 million. The exact outturn will depend on the commencement dates of the later franchises and the savings achieved. Estimates for future years are being discussed in the public expenditure survey and announcements will be made at the usual time.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the latest estimated outturn of the cost of running the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising for the year 1996–97; what was the original budget, excluding payments to franchised and non-franchised train operators; and what are his latest estimates for subsequent years. [4149]

Mr. Watts: The latest estimated outturn for Opraf's running costs for 1996–97 is £7.556 million, which is the amount voted in the supply estimates. The estimates for 1997–98 and 1998–99 remain those in table 7 of the "Transport Report 1996", Cm 3206 page 85.

Shoreditch to New Cross Underground Line

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the planned timetable for completion of refurbishment work on the Shoreditch to New Cross/New Cross Gate underground line; what was the original timetable; when the line will reopen; and if he will make a statement. [3869]

Mr. Bowis: I understand that London Underground's refurbishment and tunnel strengthening works on the East London line are well under way and that London Underground is aiming to complete the works and re-commission the line in time to re-open it in late summer 1997. The works were originally programmed to take place between March and October 1995. They are now proceeding on schedule.

British Rail Budget

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the latest estimate of the outturn of the British Railways Board for the year 1996–97; what was the original budget; what is his latest estimate of expenditure in subsequent years; and what plans he has to finance any budgetary shortfall. [4152]

Mr. Watts: British Rail's budget for 1996–97 is currently under review in the light of the faster-than-expected progress made with privatisation. Estimates of expenditure in subsequent years, and plans to finance any budgetary shortfall, will be announced after the Chancellor's Budget statement on 26 November 1996.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what loans were made to the British Railways Board in the years 1990–91, 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94; and how the expenditure funded by these loans was divided between domestic railway services and expenditure in connection with channel tunnel services. [4148]

Mr. Watts: Long-term loans from the national loans fund were made to the board as set out;

1990–91: Nil

1991–92: £850 million

1992–93: £950 million

1993–94: £625 million.

No long-term loans were obtained by the board in those years other than from the NLF. Such loans are not hypothecated to specific investment but are provided to finance the borrower's overall capital requirements, which included substantial investment related to channel tunnel services in that period.

Office of the Rail Regulator

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the latest estimated outturn of the cost of running the Office of the Rail Regulator for the year 1996–97; what was the original budget; and what estimates he has made for later years. [4146]

Mr. Watts: I am advised by the Office of the Rail Regulator that the latest estimated outturn of the cost of running the office for 1996–97 is in line with the original budget, details of which are set out in the table. I will write to the hon. Member after the Chancellor's Budget statement on 26 November 1996 with estimates of expenditure plans in subsequent years, and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

	1996–97 original estimate and forecast outturn £ million
Running costs	7.8
Capital costs	0.4
	8.2

Passenger Transport Executives (Finance)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest estimate of the total payments made in respect of railway passenger services made by central Government through the seven passenger transport executives for 1996-97; what was the original budget; and what are his latest estimates for subsequent years. [4151]

Mr. Watts: Metropolitan district councils in England receive recognition of the costs of PTE support for railway passenger services payments. This is included within the calculation of revenue support grant. The support given in this way—and its Scottish equivalent—amounts to £281.2 million for 1996–97. Railway passenger services in those areas also benefit from expenditure funded by payments under the terms of the deeds of assumption. Support for these rail services in later years has not yet been determined.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Tuberculosis

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the membership of the independent scientific review into the policy on tuberculosis and badgers which he announced on 23 July. [4497]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I am pleased to be able to announce the membership of the independent review team on tuberculosis and badgers. Apart from Professor Krebs, who has already kindly agreed to chair the review, the members are Professor Roy Anderson FRS, Dr. W. I. Morrison, Professor Douglas Young, Professor Tim Clutton-Brock FRS and Dr. Crystl Donnelly.

The review will look at the incidence of tuberculosis, in cattle and badgers and assess the scientific evidence for the links between them. It will take account of EC policies on reducing and eliminating the incidence of tuberculosis in cattle and of any risk to the human population. Its overall purpose will be to review, in the light of scientific evidence, present Government policy on badgers and tuberculosis and to make recommendations.

The review is now beginning. Interested parties who wish to submit written evidence to the committee are invited to do so before 15 January 1997.

Hybrid Wolves

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many hybrid wolves have been imported into the United Kingdom in each of the last five years. [3654]

Mr. Clappison: I have been asked to reply.

Import permits from the Department of the Environment are required only for those species of wolves listed in the appendices to the convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora—CITES. Hybrid wolves are covered by the controls if one of the parents is a listed species. The Department's records indicate that in the last five years no CITES import licences have been granted for hybrid wolves.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Union (Labour Conditions)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of *(a)* the average weekly working time and *(b)* the sickness and fatality rates of (i) European Commissioners, (ii) senior Commission officials and (iii) Members of the European Parliament. [4109]

Mr. David Davis: None. We do not recognise working time as being a genuine health and safety issue.

Turkey

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps have been taken in the European Union concerning the abuses of human rights in Turkey; and if he will make a statement. [3214]

Mr. David Davis: The European Union maintains a dialogue with Turkey on political issues, including human rights. The Council of Ministers has urged the Turkish Government to make further progress in this area. Concern about Turkey's human rights situation was expressed in the European Commission's October report on the customs union and a European Parliament resolution on 19 September.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to Turkey concerning recent killings in Cyprus; and if he will make a statement. [3215]

Mr. Davis: We have made it clear to the Turkish Government that we condemn the disproportionate use of force by security forces in the north of Cyprus, which has resulted in the tragic deaths of unarmed civilians along the ceasefire line. These incidents reinforce the importance of UN efforts to secure agreements on demanning, unloading and rules of conduct along the ceasefire lines.

Venezuela

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens are currently held in detention in Venezuela. [4212]

Dr. Liam Fox: There are three British citizens currently held in detention in Venezuela. There is also a Commonwealth citizen for whom we have consular responsibility.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations between the United Kingdom and Venezuela. [4214]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Bilateral relations are good. There is substantial UK interest in trade and investment in Venezuela. I was there in May and the Venezuelan Planning Minister and Finance Minister visited London in September and October respectively.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the charges made against Mr. Paul Loseby and Mr. James Miles who are currently being held in Venezuela. [4209]

Dr. Fox: Mr. Paul Loseby and Mr. James Miles were arrested at Caracas airport on 4 November with cocaine strapped to their bodies.

The public prosecutor will decide whether any formal charges will be made.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to visit Venezuela. [4213]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has no immediate plans to visit Venezuela. I visited in May and met several senior Venezuelan Ministers, including the President.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date and at what time the embassy in Caracas was informed of the arrest of Mr. Paul Loseby and Mr. James Miles; and for how many hours and on what days Mr. Loseby and Mr. Miles have been visited by consular officials. [4211]

Dr. Fox: The Venezuelan authorities told embassy officials in Caracas at about 11.00 hours on 6 November 1996 that two unnamed British nationals had been arrested. The same day, consular officials sought permission to visit, and were allowed to see Mr. Loseby and Mr. Miles at 15.00 hours on 7 November. The visit lasted about one hour.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Venezuelan authorities about the situation of British citizens currently being detained in Venezuela. [4215]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The British embassy in Caracas liaises regularly with the Venezuelan authorities and monitors closely the situation of all British citizens who have been detained. An EU demarche was made in July on the situation of the Venezuelan prisons and a statement was issued earlier this month by the EU presidency, following recent disturbances at the La Planta prison in Caracas.

TREASURY

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will publish the proposed rules on excessive deficits in respect of EMU; and if he will make a statement on the methods for achieving and monitoring compliance with these rules; [3553]

(2) what proposals have been put to the Council of Ministers to include amendments to article 104(b) among those matters to which decision by a majority vote would apply; [3557]

(3) if he will publish the latest proposals for a stability pact in respect of EMU; and if he will make a statement on the methods for achieving and monitoring compliance with the terms of the pact. [3554]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Rules on excessive deficits in respect of EMU and the methods for achieving and monitoring compliance with them are set out in article 104c of the Maastricht treaty. A stability pact has been proposed to clarify the practical application of these provisions. I submitted an explanatory memorandum to Parliament on the Commission's proposals for a stability pact on 31 October. The purpose of the excessive deficits procedure and the stability pact is to ensure that member states participating in EMU do not follow irresponsible fiscal policies which could affect exchange rates and drive up interest rates for other member states. Under the UK's opt-out, paragraphs 1, 9, and 11 of article 104c would not apply to the UK if the UK were to decide not to participate in stage 3 of EMU.

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what powers will be available to *(a)* the European Monetary Institute and *(b)* a future European central bank to prevent the contravention of the no bail-out provisions of article 104(b) where such a bail-out is supported by (i) a majority of and (ii) all EU member states. [3555]

Mr. Clarke: Contraventions of any part of the treaty establishing the European Community, including the no bail-out clause—article 104b—are a matter for the European Court of Justice, not for the European Monetary Institute nor for a future European Central bank.

The excessive deficits procedure in article 104c, reinforced by the proposed stability pact, is designed to ensure that member states participating in EMU act in a fiscally responsible way and should help to prevent the issue of bail-out from arising.

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what provisions exist for the variation of the rules for excessive debt in respect of EMU *(a)* generally and *(b)* specifically in relation to unfunded pension liabilities. [3551]

Mr. Clarke: The rules on excessive debt in respect of EMU are set-out in article 104c of the Maastricht treaty. Paragraph 2 of that article makes clear how excessive debt shall be treated. Protocol (No.5) of this treaty explains how debt is defined and gives its reference value. This definition includes any debt incurred as a result of expenditure arising from pensions liabilities.

Unfunded Pension Liabilities

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the possible impact on *(a)* the United Kingdom (i) if it does and (ii) if it does not participate in the EMU and *(b)* the proposed euro currency of the falling due for payment of currently unfunded *pension fund liabilities among European member states* which participate in EMU. [3550]

Mr. Clarke: I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) on 6 November, *Official Report*, columns *354–46*.

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the accuracy of the latest estimate of unfunded pension liabilities published by the International Monetary Fund. [3549]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The IMF figures show that, in relation to unfunded pensions liabilities, the UK is in a stronger position than many other leading industrial countries. All estimates of unfunded pension liabilities depend upon a number of assumptions concerning pension entitlement and contribution rates and demographic and economic trends over future decades.

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what *(a)* published and *(b)* unpublished decisions have been made of European Finance Ministers in relation to the operation of article 104(b) and unfunded pension liabilities; [3547]

(2) if he will list the meetings of European Finance Ministers at which the operation of article 104(b) in relation to unfunded pension liabilities has been discussed; [3546]

(3) what discussions have been held by *(a)* civil servants and *(b)* ministers with their counterparts in the European Union in relation to European Union member states' unfunded pension liabilities; [3548]

(4) what provisions the proposed stability pact in respect of EMU includes specifically on the treatment of unfunded pension liabilities. [3552]

Mr. Clarke: Parliament has been kept informed of discussions by European Finance Ministers in relation to the operation of article 104c. The most recent explanatory memorandum, on the Commission's proposals for a stability pact, was submitted to Parliament on 31 October.

Since November 1995, the proposed stability pact has been discussed on several occasions by the Council of European Finance Ministers, most recently on 11 November 1996. It aims to reinforce the operation of the excessive deficits procedure in EMU as set out in article 104c. Its purpose is to ensure that member states participating in EMU do not follow irresponsible fiscal policies. It is designed to ensure that if a member state needs to address the consequences of a build-up of liabilities of any kind it will not be able to fund them through excessive borrowing. This applies to all forms of liabilities, including pensions liabilities.

The UK and other member states provided the European Commission with information on pensions schemes earlier this year, and the issue of pensions liabilities will form part of the work programme of the economic policy committee over the next six months.

French Annual Deficit

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations Her Majesty's Government made in respect of the recent decision of Eurostat to allow the inclusion in the French Government's accounts of France Telecom's proposed pension payment to the French Exchequer in calculating *the French annual deficit in 1997 or 1998.* [3556]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Eurostat consulted the Committee on Monetary, Financial and Balance of Payments Statistics. The United Kingdom is represented on this committee by the Office for National Statistics and the Bank of England. Other member states are also represented by their national statistical offices and central banks.

EC (Government Debt)

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further information he has evaluated in relation to European member states' unfunded liabilities and debt since his predecessor's answers of 26 November 1991, *Official Report*, column *446*, in relation to *(a)* EC Government debt and *(b)* single currency. [3763]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: European member states regularly publish information on their Government debt. In accordance with standard internationally accepted definitions, these figures do not take account of unfunded liabilities. OECD and IMF calculations published in the last two years and based on a number of assumptions show that the UK is in a stronger position than many other leading industrial countries in relation to unfunded pension liabilities.

EDS Ltd.

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total value of payments made to EDS Ltd. since 1993 in relation to the provision of information technology services to the Inland Revenue. [2420]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 5 November 1996]:* The total value of payments made to EDS Ltd. for information technology services amounts to £356.7 million exclusive of VAT. In addition, the Department has paid £59.4 million for the use of the assets transferred when the contract started on 1 July 1994 and for the use of additional hardware purchased since that date.

Unemployment Statistics

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people *(a)* in total and *(b)* in the age bands (i) 16 to 24 years, (ii) 25 to 34 years, (iii) 35 to 44 years, (iv) 45 to 54 years, (v) 55 to 64 years and (vi) 65 years and over, have experienced (1) two, (2) three, (3) four and (4) five spells of unemployment, since 1992 in the United Kingdom; and if he will give the figures as a percentage of the economically active work force in the relevant age band. [1913]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms. Judith Church dated 14 November 1996;

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how many people have experienced two, three, four and five spells of unemployment, since 1992 in the United Kingdom, by age.

The available data are shown in the following table. Data are only available for Great Britain.

Number of people in Great Britain who have experienced at least one spell of claimant unemployment since January 1992, by number of spells experienced

Number of spells of unemployment

Age band (years)	*One*	*Two*	*Three*	*Four*	*Five or more*	*Total*
16–24	1,680.7	960.6	555.0	302.7	314.0	3,813.0
25–34	1,320.7	62.8	317.8	156.8	165.6	2,588.8
35–44	927.5	403.8	190.3	86.3	92.7	1,700.6
45–54	872.3	332.8	138.1	62.6	66.8	1,472.6
55–64	541.8	124.8	38.9	15.2	14.5	735.1
65 and over	0.4	0	0	0	0	0.4
All ages	5,343.7	2,449.9	1,240.1	623.6	653.7	10,310.9

Great Britain.

It is not possible to calculate proportions as a percentage of the economically active workforce because the corresponding number of people who have never been economically active over the period is not known—only point in time estimates of the latter are available.

Tax Changes

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his timetable for *(a)* the abolition of (i) capital gains tax and (ii) inheritance tax, and *(b)* implementing a standard rate of tax at 20p in the pound; and if he will make a statement. [3245]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* The Government remain committed to the long-term aims of abolishing capital gains tax and inheritance tax, and reducing the basic rate of income tax to 20 per cent., as and when resources permit.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the number and percentage of economically inactive (i) men, (ii) women and (iii) people of working age in the United Kingdom and for each region in *(a)* 1981, *(b)* 1991 and *(c)* 1996, indicating the percentage changes since 1981; [2810]

(2) what are the latest figures for the number and percentage of economically inactive *(a)* men and *(b)* people of working age for (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) each region aged (1) 16 to 24, (2) 25 to 34, (3) 35 to 49 and (4) 50 to 64 years; [2811]

(3) what are the latest figures for the number and percentage of economically inactive *(a)* women and *(b)* men of working age for the United Kingdom and for each region aged (i) 16 to 24, (ii) 25 to 34, (iii) 35 to 49 and (iv) 50 to 59 years. [2813]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Peter Hain, dated 14 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to rely as the Director of the Office for National Statistics on your recent questions (2810, 2811 and 2813) on various breakdowns of the economically inactive of working age by region.

The information is available from the Labour Force Survey database which can be accessed by the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what percentage of economically inactive *(a)* men and *(b)* women of working age are classed as (i) sick, (ii) disabled and (iii) voluntary retirees; [2812]

(2) what percentage of economically inactive people of working age are classed as *(a)* sick, *(b)* disabled and *(c)* voluntary retirees. [2814]

Mrs. Knight *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Peter Hain, dated 14 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics on your recent questions (2812 and 2814) on the numbers of economically inactive of working age who are sick, disabled or retired.

The available information is shown in the table.

Economically inactive people of working age[1] by gender and reason for inactivity (Great Britain, Spring 1996)

Reason for inactivity (as percentage of all inactive)

	All economically inactive[2]	Temporarily sick or injured	Long-term sick or disabled	Retired	Other
Total	7,491	2.9	26.2	5.9	65.1
Men	2,765	3.8	40.7	11.0	44.5
Women	4,727	2.3	17.7	2.9	77.1

Note:
[1] Working age is defined as 16–64 for men and 16–59 for women.
[2]= 100 per cent.

Source:
Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics.

Taxation (Self-assessment)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if self-assessed taxpayers who are selected for random audit in 1997–98 will be told that they are being investigated for purely statistical reasons; [3111]

(2) how many random audits his Department plans to carry out in 1997–98 under self-assessment power S9A TMA 1970. [3112]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:* No tax returns will be selected for inquiry purely for statistical reasons.

Most returns will be selected on the basis of an identified tax risk, but the Inland Revenue proposes to select approximately 10,000 tax returns for inquiry on a random basis during 1997–98, that is about 0.1 per cent. of all self-assessment returns. First and foremost, random inquiries will help to deter would-be tax evaders, who believe they might otherwise successfully cover their

tracks and so avoid selection for inquiry. They will also help the Department to identify new areas of high risk and indicate levels of compliance.

The Inland Revenue will not tell any taxpayer the basis on which his return has been chosen for inquiry, since to do so would undermine the effectiveness of this new power and could introduce unnecessary confrontation into inquiry work.

The Inland Revenue aims for high standards in its inquiry work and has published a new code of practice 11—"Enquiries into tax returns by local Tax offices"—explaining how this will be conducted under self-assessment.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps the Inland Revenue is taking to ensure that queries about the self-assessment system are dealt with speedily. [3255]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:* The Inland Revenue will seek to achieve the published standards of customer service for 1996–97 for all taxpayers including those affected by self-assessment.

The capacity of tax inquiry centres and switchboards has been reviewed and where appropriate enhanced. A helpline has been established to assist taxpayers outside normal working hours.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff the Inland Revenue had *(a)* in 1994 and *(b)* in each subsequent year; and what increases in staffing there will be to cover the period of the introduction of self-assessment. [3322]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:*

(a) At 1 April 1994 the Inland Revenue, excluding the Valuation Office Agency, had 58,569 staff in post;

(b) The numbers for subsequent years are:

April: 54,562

April: 52,150

There will be no increase in staff numbers to cover the introduction of self-assessment, but measures have been taken to ensure that a higher level of customer service is available in a number of ways to help with any queries which may arise during the introductory period.

Taxation Letters

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many letters the Inland Revenue has received *(a)* in total and *(b)* from self-employed people in each quarter during the last five years. [3253]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:* The Inland Revenue does not currently disaggregate information on post volumes by origin or type of post. The table shows quarterly volumes of post received since April 1993. Earlier figures are obtainable only at disproportionate cost.

Year		*Total volume of post received* [1]
1993–94	First quarter	33,133,062
	Second quarter	32,755,151
	Third quarter	33,124,631
	Fourth quarter	31,089,124
1994–95	First quarter	35,665,814
	Second quarter	32,394,943
	Third quarter	33,332,228
	Fourth quarter	29,986,006
1995–96	First quarter	29,807,052
	Second quarter	29,388,557
	Third quarter	31,992,414
	Fourth quarter	29,480,783
1996–97	First quarter	29,149,287
	Second quarter	26,991,811

[1] Figures are for Inland Revenue regional executive offices responsible for assessing and collecting income tax, corporation tax and capital gains tax.

Inland Revenue (Letters)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average time the Inland Revenue took to answer letters *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in each subsequent year. [3260]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:* The Inland Revenue does not collect information on average response times. Instead, it measures performance against its customer service standard of replying to all types of post within 28 days. These customer service results are published annually in the board of Inland Revenue report, copies of which are in the House of Commons Library.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Company Directors

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received asking him to make it a criminal offence for a director of a company knowingly to make untrue statements about a competitor company to an hon. Member, a Member of the House of Lords or a Member of the European Parliament; if he will consider such a proposal; and if he will make a statement. [3530]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have received no such representations. Any person, whether or not a director of a company, must already have regard in any statement about a third party which he or she may make to a Member of Parliament to the application of the law of defamation to the statement in any circumstances outside the scope of the strict rules of absolute parliamentary privilege.

Employment Agencies

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make an assessment of the applicability of those sections of the Employment Act 1973 covering employment agencies to the activities of international executive search agencies operating in the United Kingdom. [3776]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The applicability of the Employment Agencies Act 1973 and associated regulations to the activities of international executive search agencies is a matter to be assessed by my Department on a case-by-case basis.

Nuclear Installations Inspectorate

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish the report of the nuclear installations inspectorate on safety at Dounreay; what contamination of the site and of staff is reported; what improvement notices have been served; what staff reductions there have been over the past 12 months; what private contractors are currently working on the site and what work each is undertaking; if he will now review his privatisation programme; and if he will make a statement. [3656]

Mr. Page: I am advised by the Health and Safety Executive HSE that it has not produced such a report, but it served two improvement notices on Dounreay in 1995 and a further two notices last month. Details of changes in staff numbers and of the work being undertaken on the site by private contractors are operational matters for the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority. The UKAEA will keep the use of commercial contractors under review to ensure that they continue to contribute to the safe and cost-effective management of the Dounreay site.

Salaries (Publication)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to require companies to publish annually the salaries paid to their highest and lowest paid staff. [2036]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 13 November 1996]:* I have no plans to require companies to publish this information.

Companies are already required to disclose certain information about the remuneration of their employees and of their directors. In many cases this includes a requirement to disclose the remuneration of the highest-paid director.

Consumer Protection (Computer Software)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about consumer protection in respect of computer software. [3265]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 13 November 1996]:* Consumers buying packaged computer software enjoy the same statutory rights under the Sale of Goods Act 1979 as when buying any other type of good. However, if the hon. Member has any specific concerns about computer protection in respect of computer software, he may wish to write to me with them.

Launch Aid

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those companies which have received launch aid in each year since 1979 and the level of support given. [3694]

Mr. Greg Knight *[holding answer 13 November 1996]:* The information is as follows, in £ million:

	Westland Helicopters Ltd.	*British Aerospace plc*	*Short Brothers plc*	*Rolls-Royce (1971) Ltd. and Rolls-Royce plc*
1979–80	0	0	0	75.4
1980–81	0	0	0	67.1
1981–82	0	0	0	92.6
1982–83	10.0	0	0	53.5
1983–84	10.7	0	0	74.6
1984–85	17.7	46.5	0	20.0
1985–86	8.6	73.0	0	22.7
1986–87	5.7	86.0	0	27.3
1987–88	8.1	44.5	0	0
1988–89	9.9	87.8	0	0
1989–90	10.1	122.5	0	0
1990–91	7.1	134.0	0	0
1991–92	5.1	73.5	0	0
1992–93	2.8	28.6	0	0
1993–94	0.6	0	0	0
1994–95	2.0	0	0	0
1995–96	0	0	16.4	0

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the launch aid receipts for each year from 1979. [3693]

Mr. Knight *[holding answer 13 November 1996]:* The information is as follows , in £ million:

1979–80: 4.3
1980–81: 9.9
1981–82: 9.3
1982–83: 11.4
1983–84: 9.2
1984–85: 11.8
1985–86: 16.4
1986–87: 24.5
1987–88: 27.3
1988–89: 21.5
1989–90: 42.4
1990–91: 51.8
1991–92: 83.0
1992–93: 75.7
1993–94: 55.3
1994–95: 46.9
1995–96: 51.7.

The total amount of launch aid levy receipts recorded by my Department for the financial years 1961–62 to 1995–96 inclusive is £602.7 million, not £597.7 million as previously published in my answer to the hon. Member on 30 October 1996, *Official Report*, column *152*.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what level of support was paid to the aerospace industry under the launch aid programme in each year since 1979. [3692]

Mr. Knight *[holding answer 13 November 1996]:* The information is as follows, in £ million:

1979–80: 75.4
1980–81: 67.1
1981–82: 92.6
1982–83: 63.5
1983–84: 85.3
1984–85: 84.2

1985–86: 104.3
1986–87: 119.0
1987–88: 52.6
1988–89: 97.7
1989–90: 132.6
1990–91: 141.1
1991–92: 78.6
1992–93: 31.4
1993–94: 0.6
1994–95: 2.0
1995–96: 16.4.

The total amount of launch aid recorded by my Department as having been allocated towards civil aeronautics projects between the 1961–62 and 1995–96 financial years is £1,532.4 million, not £968.1 million as previously published in my answer to the hon. Member on 30 October 1996, *Official Report*, column *152*.

Small Businesses

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many firms data have been inputted on to the Department's small business data. [4158]

Mr. Page: The Department does not keep a database of small businesses.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of UK small and medium-sized firms export; what are the equivalent figures in each EU country; and what is the EU average. [4157]

Mr. Page: Data on the percentage of small and medium-sized firms that export are not collected, either for the United Kingdom or for other EU countries.

Business Angel Scheme

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the results of the pilot scheme on a business angel introduction scheme at five training and enterprise councils. [4131]

Mr. Page: The five informal investment demonstration projects, for which the Government provided pump-priming funding, were very successful both in terms of the number of investors registered and the number of investments made in local businesses. They also succeeded in raising the profile of informal investment among owners of businesses and potential investors.

The five TEC-based business introduction services continue to operate alongside those run by a wide variety of other organisations, including a number of business links.

Airline Alliance

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those airlines which his Department has consulted on the British Airways-American Airlines proposed alliance since his receipt of the report by the Office of Fair Trading. [3871]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Department of Trade and Industry has received correspondence from Virgin Atlantic, Trans World Airlines, United Airlines, British Airways and Continental Airlines since receipt of the Director General of Fair Trading's advice.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has yet to take his decision on this case. It is not the Department's practice to consult interested parties during the period between receipt of the director general's report and the president's decision.

Third parties had the opportunity to make their views known to the director general and these were included in his advice to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

SCOTLAND

Prescribed Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many elderly *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been admitted to hospital as a consequence of an adverse reaction to (i) non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, (ii) phenothiazines, (iii) diuretics, (iv) analgesics, (v) night sedation, (vi) digoxin, (vii) laxatives, (viii) corticosteroids, (ix) beta blockers and (x) aminophylline, in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [2902]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is shown in the table. It is not possible separately to identify the individual drugs listed. The answer shows classes of drugs, which include those listed.

Hospitalisations of patients 60 and over with a diagnosis relating to the adverse effects of specified drugs: Scotland 1991–1995

		1991		1992		1993		1994		1995	
	Code[1]	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
(i) Local anti-infectives and anti-inflammatory drugs	E946.0	21	57	31	49	36	53	39	77	46	86
(ii) Phenothiazine-based tranquillisers	E939.1	14	20	14	28	23	33	21	23	21	35
(iii) Water, mineral and uric acid metabolism drugs	E944	51	115	46	129	54	99	59	95	60	137
(iv) Analgesics, antipyretics and antirheumatics	E935	117	167	123	150	123	168	148	210	191	233
(v) Sedatives and hypnotics	E937	6	6	7	10	10	10	12	4	6	12

Hospitalisations of patients 60 and over with a diagnosis relating to the adverse effects of specified drugs: Scotland 1991–1995

	Code[1]	1991		1992		1993		1994		1995	
		Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
(vi) Agents primarily affecting the cardiovascular system: cardiotonic glycosides and drugs of similar action (includes digitalis glycosides, digoxin and strophantins)	E942.1	61	157	52	145	59	141	48	140	59	166
(vii) Agents primarily affecting gastrointestinal system: irritant cathartics, emollient cathartics and digestants	E943.1–3	2	0	1	0	0	4	1	3	2	9
(viii) Adrenal cortical steroids	E932.0	43	62	30	41	23	57	29	51	38	60
(ix) Cardiac rhythm regulators	E942.0	43	57	57	48	51	58	54	66	77	72
(x) Antiasthmatics	E945.7	7	8	0	3	3	8	3	3	6	10

[1] Diagnoses are coded to the World Health Organisation's international classification of diseases 9th revision (ICD9).

Planning Guidelines

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what evaluation his Department has made of the capacity of the planning system to absorb a new *(a)* low-impact and *(b)* permaculture use class into existing guidelines; and what assessment he has made of the advantages of this policy; [3367]

(2) what research his Department has *(a)* planned, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* evaluated into the advantages of establishing a permaculture use class within the planning system; and if he will make a statement. [3377]

Mr. Kynoch: The Scottish Office has not planned, commissioned or evaluated any research on the subject of low-impact or permaculture use classes. The existing use classes, set out in the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Scotland) Order 1989, are based on the actual use of buildings or land. Each class is made up of uses which are similar in nature and in their impacts on the environment and amenity. Their purpose is to determine whether a change of use requiring planning consent has taken place. Introducing new use classes based only on environmental impacts would not be practicable as they would be incompatible with existing use classes and other planning legislation. Environmental impacts are material considerations to be taken into account in determining individual planning applications.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what assessment his Department had made of the capacity of the planning system to accommodate low-impact development; and if he will make a statement; [3356]

(2) what research his Department has *(a)* planned, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* evaluated into establishing practical criteria for assessing sustainable and low-impact developments, with particular regard to rural areas; and if he will make a statement. [3268]

Mr. Kynoch: The Scottish Office has not planned, commissioned or evaluated any research specifically on the subject of assessing sustainable and low-impact developments. However, the Scottish Office provides a range of guidance, advice and support designed to encourage sustainable development in rural areas which benefits local residents. The planning system is designed to be flexible enough to assess and accommodate all types of development. Each planning application is considered on its own merits, taking account of all material considerations which apply in that particular case.

European Monetary Union

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment has been made of the effects of European monetary union on the Scottish economy; and what preparations have been taken in respect of such effects. [1532]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 31 October 1996]:* I have been asked to reply.

An assessment of the implications for the whole of the United Kingdom of the European single currency will be made nearer the time. At this stage sufficient information to carry out a full assessment is not available. There are still many unknowns and uncertainties, including which countries are likely to meet the conditions for joining and how much convergence will have been achieved.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Concessionary Television Licences

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will introduce a wider system of concessionary television licences for people in *(a)* sheltered accommodation and *(b)* elsewhere; and if she will make a statement. [3770]

Mr. Sproat: During the passage of the Broadcasting Act 1996, the Government undertook to address the situation arising when the residents of a sheltered housing scheme which meets all other qualifying criteria fail to qualify for concessionary licences because a small number of units within the scheme were purchased under the right to buy provisions before the accommodation was designated as sheltered housing. We hope to lay new consolidated television licensing regulations before the end of the year, and they will address this anomaly. There are no plans to extend any further the availability of concessionary television licences. As stated in the 1994 White Paper, "The Future of the BBC", Cm. 2621, the Government believe that the right way to help the less well off, of all ages, is through the welfare and benefit systems.

EDS Ltd.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many contracts her Department, agencies and associated bodies have had with EDS for each year since 1985; what was the value of each contract; if she will indicate for each contract *(a)* if it was completed, *(b)* what modifications were made at the request of (i) the company and (ii) the Department and *(c)* if work under contract is being undertaken in-house; and if she will make a statement on the number of job reductions in her Department arising from the contracting out of work by EDS. [3813]

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage was established on 13 April 1992 and The Royal Parks agency was established on 1 April 1993. Since those dates, the Department and its agencies have not let any contracts to EDS.

Football Grounds

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what is her policy in respect of premiership football clubs whose grounds need major work to bring them up to the standards of the Taylor report; [3685]

(2) what estimate she has made of the costs to premiership football clubs of major works required to bring their grounds up to the standards of the Taylor report. [3686]

Mr. Sproat: Premiership football clubs were required to meet the all-seater recommendations in the Taylor report by August 1994. All clubs in the premiership, except Sunderland, now meet these requirements. Sunderland was granted an extension to relocate to a new all-seater stadium in time for the start of next season.

ENVIRONMENT

Council Tax

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list *(a)* the Band D council tax precepts for all districts in Somerset, Devon, Wiltshire and Dorset in 1995–96 and 1996–97 and the percentage change, and *(b)* the same information for each other district in England where the band D increase was higher than 10 per cent. [3531]

Sir Paul Beresford: The basic amount of council tax set by a shire district for district level services comprises the district's own council tax requirement and those of parish councils within its area. The basic amount and the amounts accounted for by the parish precepts are shown in the table below. These amounts are added to the county council and the shire police precepts to form the band D council tax for each district's area.

Band D basic amounts of council tax in 1995–96 and 1996–97

	1995–96		*1996–97*		
	council tax for district level services £ *(1)*	*Of which average parish precept* £ *(2)*	*council tax for district level services* £ *(3)*	*Of which average parish precept* £ *(4)*	*Percentage increase in council tax (col3–col1) / col 1 per cent. (5)*
Somerset					
Mendip	86	21	108	23	25.2
Sedgemoor	90	12	94	13	3.5
Taunton Deane	30	4	71	4	135.7
West Somerset	99	23	105	23	5.7
Devon					
East Devon	66	9	75	9	12.9
Exeter	72	0	65	0	-9.9
Mid Devon	81	11	88	13	8.8
North Devon	94	13	84	14	-10.3
Plymouth	122	0	152	0	24.8
South Hams	77	16	89	17	15.7
Teignbridge	74	14	91	15	23.1
Torbay	65	0	71	0	9.1
Torridge	28	9	49	10	76.0
West Devon	99	18	106	19	7.3
Wiltshire					
Kennet	60	27	70	27	17.4
North Wiltshire	112	36	114	38	1.7
Salisbury	45	12	82	13	82.1
Thamesdoen	108	12	111	12	2.9
West Wiltshire	93	17	87	19	-6.6
Dorset					
Bournemouth	71	0	69	0	-3.4
Christchurch	54	0	58	0	6.5
North Dorset	44	23	65	26	48.3
Poole	69	0	76	0	10.0
Purbeck	56	17	62	18	10.8
West Dorset	73	28	81	31	11.4
Weymouth and Portland	85	0	71	0	-16.0

A table showing information for all other districts in England where the band D increase in council tax for district level services was higher than 10 per cent., has today been placed in the Library of the House.

Regional Development Funding

Sir Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those applications from Cornwall and Devon that have given approval for European regional development fund objective 5b funding, indicating the financial amounts approved and the total cost of each project; how many applications have been submitted hitherto but refused; how many applications are currently being considered; and what is the total finance involved. [3455]

Sir Paul Beresford: I am today placing copies of the information in the Library of the House.

Hybrid Wolves

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what advice his Department has issued to local authorities on the subject of hybrid

wolves; what plans he has to issue further advice; and what requests his Department has received for such guidance; [3652]

(2) if he will make a statement on his Department's definition of a hybrid wolf for the purposes of licensing. [3653]

Mr. Clappison: The Department has received requests for guidance on hybrid wolves from the following local authorities: Bassetlaw district council, Birmingham city council, Broxtowe borough council, Newark and Sherwood district council; Rotherham metropolitan borough council; South Cambridgeshire district council, the City of Wakefield metropolitan district council and Wolverhampton metropolitan borough council.

Under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976, a licence to keep a wolf is required from the local authority. A licence is also required to keep any hybrid where one parent is—or both parents are—of a kind specified in the schedule to the Act. The Department has so advised those local authorities seeking guidance. There are no plans to issue any further central guidance to local authorities.

Rents

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the level of rent paid by *(a)* private tenants and *(b)* recipients of housing benefit; and if he will make a statement. [3809]

Mr. Clappison: The 1995–96 survey of English housing estimated the average weekly rent of private tenants to be £70 per week. The average weekly rent for private tenants on housing benefit was the same. Assured tenants on benefit paid an average of £8 per week less than those who were not receiving benefit, but there were more benefit recipients in this sector. The table gives full details.

Rents and proportions of private tenants by type of tenancy: HB and non-HB

	Regulated	*Assured and assured shorthold*	*Not accessible to the public (e.g. employer)*	*Resident landlord*	*All*
Average rent					(£ a week)
HB recipients	39	79	—	45	70
Non-HB	40	87	34	44	69
All	39	84	34	44	70
Proportion in tenancy type					Per cent.
HB recipients	18	75	0	7	100
Non-HB	10	52	27	12	100
All	12	59	19	10	100

These figures are supported by other research for the Department, which found that when all other factors are held constant, private tenants receiving housing benefit do not pay significantly different rents from tenants who are not on housing benefit.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about unfair rents and rent capping in the last 12 months. [3810]

Mr. Clappison: We have received a wide range of representations. For example, landlords of regulated tenants argue that they should be freed from the controls of the Rent Act 1977 and allowed to charge market rents; tenants in the deregulated sector argue that full housing benefit should be available to support above average rents. We believe that the current legislation provides the right balance between the interests of landlords, tenants and the taxpayer.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met representatives of the Housing Corporation; and what was discussed. [3768]

Mr. Clappison: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration last met the chairman of Housing Corporation on 16 October to discuss various matters, including finances and board membership.

Housing Starts

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new housing starts there were in each year since 1976, broken down into *(a)* local authority housing, *(b)* housing association housing and *(c)* private housing; and if he will make a statement. [3808]

Mr. Clappison: Estimates of house building are shown in the publication "Housing and Construction Statistics". Figures for 1976 to 1992 are in tables 6.1 of the annual editions covering the period from 1976 to 1986 through to the annual edition covering 1983 to 1993. The latest figures for 1993, 1994, 1995 and the first six months of 1996 are in the quarterly publication "Housing and Construction Statistics, Part 1—June 1996".

Copies of these publications are in the Library.

Housing Associations

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met representatives of housing associations; and what was discussed. [3767]

Mr. Clappison: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration last met the chairman and chief executive of the National Housing Federation on 18 September at a reception to mark the raising of £10 billion of private finance for housing associations since the Housing Act 1988.

Homelessness

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met representatives of homelessness charities to discuss projects for the homeless. [3769]

Mr. Clappison: On 31 October, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration met representatives from CHAR, Crisis, Homeless Network and Shelter to discuss the Government's proposals to provide further help to tackle rough sleeping, building on the success of the rough sleepers initiative. Those proposals were set out in my right hon. Friend's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) on 31 October, *Official*

Report, column *187*. These voluntary sector agencies, and Centrepoint, have indicated their willingness to work nationally with Government Departments, local authorities and other agencies to help ensure that there is no necessity for people to sleep rough.

British Waterways

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the privatisation of British Waterways. [3870]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have no plans to privatise British Waterways.

Business Rates

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's estimate of the number of sports clubs which pay business rates on their premises. [4142]

Mr. Curry: My Department estimates that about 10,000 sports clubs are liable for rates in England. Many will have their bills reduced or remitted in full by local authorities using their discretionary powers.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of business rates paid in the last year for which figures are available on sporting rights relate to *(a)* shooting, *(b)* fly fishing and *(c)* coarse fishing. [4141]

Mr. Curry: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the representations he received asking for the abolition of the business rate on sporting rights showing the name of the organisation or individual requesting such abolition and the date such representations were received by his Department; [4143]

(2) if he will list the representations he received asking for the abolition or reduction of the business rate on sports club premises, showing the name of the organisation or individual requesting such abolition and the date such representations were received by his Deaprtmetn. [4144]

Mr. Curry: I have received a number of representations over the past three years. I will write to the hon. Member with further details in due course.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library a list indicating for each local authority area the amount received from business rates on sporting rights. [4140]

Mr. Curry: The information requested is not held centrally. There are about 6,000 sporting rights in England. We estimate that local authorities receive less than £5 million in respect of rates on those hereditaments.

Development Land, Bedfordshire

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he called in proposals for development of land near the village of Henlow, Bedfordshire. [4210]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have decided to call in this proposal for industrial and commercial development on a former sand and gravel pit. The decision was issued today.

Environment Agency

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the annual report and accounts of the Environment Agency 1995–96. [4080]

Mr. Clappison: The financial statements in the Environment Agency's annual report and accounts for 1995–96 were audited by auditors appointed by the Secretary of State. We are satisfied from the auditors' report that the funds of the agency were properly and well managed. The Secretary of State laid the annual report and accounts before Parliament in July 1996.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received in relation to the implications of the Lappel bank judgment of the European Court of Justice for *(a)* the Cardiff bay barrage and *(b)* other wetland schemes with present or previous conservation protection; and if he will make a statement. [4134]

Mr. Clappison: The Secretary of State has received one representation about the implications of the Lappel bank judgment for the Cardiff bay barrage. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales informed the hon. Member on 18 July, *Official Report*, column *643*, the European Commission has accepted the Government's position on the construction of the Cardiff bay barrage. We have had no representations about other wetland schemes.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has had in 1996 with non-governmental groups on the protection of sites of special scientific interest. [4081]

Mr. Clappison: There is effective dialogue across a range of environmental issues with non-governmental groups, but Ministers in my Department have not consulted them specifically in 1996 about the protection of sites of special scientific interest.

Information Flows

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to publish the outcome of his recent efficiency scrutiny into information flows between central and local government; and if he will make a statement. [4499]

Mr. Curry: I have today published for consultation the report of an efficiency scrutiny into information flows between central and local government in England.

I am determined to cut the burden of paperwork generated by the demands for information from local government. This report makes a number of challenging recommendations for both central and local government which aim to cut the paper flow by up to one third, making savings of £8 million to £10 million a year, as well as delivering improvements in the accuracy and value of the information.

We will look carefully at the report's recommendations and, following consultation with local government, prepare, and publish in the new year, an action plan for implementing the report. As the report recognises, improvements are already happening. Today's publication will give a welcome boost to that work.

I am today writing to the chairmen of the local authority associations inviting their comments on the report's recommendations, which we shall take into account in the preparation of the action plan. I am also inviting the associations to join a joint group with representatives of the main Whitehall Departments involved to oversee implementation of the action plan.

The key recommendations of the report cover:

Reducing the volume of data collected by cutting down the level of detail or the frequency with which information is collected, eliminating duplication and making greater use of sample surveys.

Improving the value and usefulness of data by standardising definitions, reviewing forms with those who have to complete them, and taking steps to improve understanding of: what is required, how the data will be used, and how the information provided relates to the quality and level of activity on the ground.

Further work or separate reviews in a number of areas, including specific grant regimes, fire and probation services, school building projects and grants for higher education.

Improving the arrangements for housing and transport capital programmes, and for European regional development fund and European social fund—ESF—grants, including greater delegation of responsibility in some areas to the Government offices for the regions.

I am arranging for copies of the report to be placed in the Library of the House. Copies are being sent to the local authority associations and to individual local authorities in England.

Housing Revenue Account

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to issue the draft housing revenue account subsidy and item 8 determinations for 1997–98. [4565]

Mr. Clappison: Local authorities have today been sent the draft housing revenue account subsidy and item 8 determinations for 1997–98. They have been invited to let my Department have their views by 6 December 1996.

We are proposing that the average guideline rent for 1997–98 should be £35.36 a week. It is only 73p per week more than this year's guideline rent. Guideline rent increases for individual authorities would range between 48p and 98p.

To encourage authorities to keep their rent increases within the guideline increase, we propose to continue with the present rule limiting rent rebate subsidy. This does not affect tenants' entitlement to housing benefit, but does provide authorities with a strong incentive to keep rent increases down to reasonable levels.

Total provision within the subsidy system for expenditure by authorities on management and maintenance in 1997–98 will be over £3.3 billion. This is about the same per dwelling as in the current financial year.

We believe that there is still scope for town hall housing departments to secure efficiency savings and reduce their spending. The opportunities are there. We would like to see authorities taking a hard look at their housing services and finding better and more efficient ways of delivering them. This might include, for example, the involvement of housing associations or others in the private sector in the delivery of services. Even modest economies would help tenants by keeping rent increases down.

Copies of the draft determinations have been placed in the House Library.

Housing Act 1996

Sir Jim Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to make an order to commence parts VI and VII of the Housing Act 1996. [4694]

Mr. Curry: I shall make the order to commence these provisions in England and Wales shortly. Part VII will commence on 20 January 1997. Part VI will commence on 1 April 1997; this will give local authorities additional time to set up effective new allocation schemes.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensions (Age Addition)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people, aged 80 years or above, are currently in receipt of an additional pension of 25p per week; how many of those people are currently in receipt of income support; how many of those people have their additional pension deducted in full from their income support; and if he will make a statement. [4137]

Mr. Roger Evans: It is estimated that 2,299,000 persons were eligible for the age addition as at September 1995. As at November 1995, 746,000 also received income support, either as the claimant or a partner, accounting for 700,000 benefit units. It is assumed that all of these persons will have the additional amount deducted in full from their income support.

Notes:

1. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

2. Benefit units may be a single person or a couple. Either the claimant, their partner, or both claimant and partner may be in receipt to the age addition.

3. The data given assume that any person aged 80 or over receives the additional 25p per week, and that this amount is deducted from the person's income support in all cases.

4. Data refer to persons entitled to the additional amount. No data are available regarding numbers actually receiving the age addition.

5. Numbers include persons in residential care and nursing homes.

Source:

1. "Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry November 1995" (5 per cent. sample)

2. "Retirement Pension Biannual Enquiry" correct at 30 September 1995.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy that the additional pension paid to those of 80 years and above be disregarded in full payment of income support. [4139]

Mr. Evans: No, we have no plans to introduce a disregard of the 25p age addition in the calculation of income support. Income support has a three-tier structure to reflect the increasing costs of older income support claimants. The pensioner premium is awarded automatically when a claimant reaches age 60, this is replaced by the enhanced pensioner premium at age 75 and the higher pensioner premium at age 80.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the net cost of increasing the additional pension paid to those aged 80 years or above by the rate of inflation since the additional pension was introduced; what would be the net cost of increasing the additional pension by that figure *(a)* by inflation plus £5 per week and *(b)* by inflation plus £10 per week; and if he will make a statement. [4154]

Mr. Heald: The net cost of increasing the 25p age addition in retirement pension by the rate of inflation since 1971 would be £100 million in 1996–97. The age addition itself would be £1.65 per week.

The net cost of increasing the age addition in 1996–97 by inflation since 1971 and an extra £5 a week would be £460 million.

The net cost of increasing the age addition in 1996–97 by inflation since 1971 and an extra £10 a week would be £850 million.

The Government are committed to focusing help on the most needy pensioners. We have increased the higher pensioner premium in the income support scheme, for the over-80s, by more than 40 per cent. since 1988. This premium is currently £25.15 for single pensioners and £35.95 for couples. Raising this premium is a better way of focusing help on pensioners with low incomes than increasing the 25p age addition for all pensioners, regardless of their individual needs.

Sources:

1. Estimates of the gross costs of contributory retirement pensions were provided by the Government actuary's department.

2. Estimates of the gross costs of non-contributory retirement pensions were based on the 1996 departmental report.

3. Estimates of net costs were calculated using the policy simulation model 1996–97, which is based upon data from the family expenditure surveys 1991, 1992 and 1993; uprated to 1996–97 prices, benefit rates and caseloads, consistent with the 1996 departmental report.

Capital and Income Limits

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish for each benefit and each capital or income limit which was not increased in April 1996 *(a)* the reasons for not doing so and *(b)* the current value of each such benefit or limit and the value which would have resulted from increasing it in line with prices and average earnings when he announces the April 1997 uprating since it was (i) last increased or (ii) introduced. [4082]

Mr. Heald: No. The announcement of benefit rates from April 1997 will be in a similar format to previous years.

Unrest Abroad

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which countries have been notified to him by the Home Secretary since 12 October 1995 as having undergone a significant upheaval. [4084]

Mr. Roger Evans: None. I understand that no countries have been designated by the Home Secretary as having been subject to a significant upheaval since the mechanism was first introduced in February 1996.

Appeals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) pursuant to his answer on 4 November, *Official Report*, column *387*, when he approved the current appeal form for the purposes of regulation 3(1) of the Social Security (Adjudication) Regulations 1995, as amended with effect from 21 October; [4086]

(2) what response he has made to the recommendation of the Council on Tribunals that, in the information supplied to people appealing to social security, disability and child support appeal tribunals, there should be an emphasis on the desirability of oral hearings; and what steps he has taken to implement that recommendation. [4083]

Mr. Roger Evans: The appeal form currently available was approved on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in February 1996, a copy of which is in the Library. The revised form, to be distributed next week, was similarly approved on 27 September. A copy will be placed in the Library. The Council on Tribunals was assured that we would make appellants aware of the consequences of not opting for an oral hearing. The current form encourages attendance by saying that appellants who attend do better than those who do not, and the tribunal wants to hear what the appellant has to say. The revised form will retain this message and make it more promirent.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he has taken to obtain the views of tribunal members on the questions raised in the consultation paper, "Improving Decision Making and Appeals in Social Security", Cm. 3328. [4087]

Mr. Evans: The president of the independent tribunal service who is responsible for all Social Security tribunals, including tribunals considering child support, medical and disability questions, and their members, was formally consulted on the Government's proposals contained in the Green Paper, "Improving decision making and appeals in Social Security". The president in turn consulted his staff before responding to the Government's proposals and his response includes the views of tribunal members.

The president also invited his staff to respond directly if they wished and a number of tribunal members have responded separately to the Government's consultation. A total of 100 copies of the Green Paper and the Green Paper summary were sent to the ITS for internal distribution. That included copies sent direct to regional chairmen and full-time chairmen. Additional copies were also made available.

Child Support Regulations

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what procedures have been put in place for monitoring the effects of the Social Security (Adjudication) and Child Support Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1996. [4088]

Mr. Roger Evans: Existing statistical information, which is collected on a regular basis, will be supplemented by additional research over the coming months in order to evaluate the effects of these regulations.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will amend the Income Support (General) Regulations to make income support payable to asylum seekers at the full rate. [4085]

Mr. Roger Evans: No. Asylum seekers, entitled to benefit while their applications are considered, are paid at a reduced rate because of the temporary nature of their immigration status.

Century Date Change (Computers)

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost effects of the millennium date change on the computer systems operated by his Department since his answer of 13 June, *Official Report*, column *261*. [4101]

Mr. Burt: The Department has set up a central project to manage the effects of the year 2000 date change. Work is continuing and a full analysis of the problem and an initial estimate of costs is expected by the end of January 1997.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the future of local customer survey, undertaken by the Benefits Agency. [3351]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr David. Hinchliffe, dated 13 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will make a statement on the future of local customer surveys, undertaken by the Benefits Agency (BA).

District Managers, who are the local budget holders, have the responsibility for deciding whether to fund local customer surveys from within their existing budgets.

Local surveys assist managers in establishing customers' needs, so that resources and service provision are properly targeted. The results of these surveys also assists in the longer term planning process. Surveys give valuable immediate feedback on caller and telephone business, including highlighting peaks and troughs of performance, enabling managers to take steps to improve performance where needed. A further use of local customer surveys is to obtain feedback about proposed changes to business delivery.

Any BA Unit seeking to be successful in their application for a Chartermark award must conduct local customer surveys.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the future of review visits by the Benefits Agency. [3350]

Mr. Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 13 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will make a statement on the future of review visits by the Benefits Agency (BA).

Review visits are carried out as part of the BA's Targeted Review programme, although reviews may also be carried out by post or telephone. 1.2 million cases in total are expected to be reviewed this year (1996/97), by all three methods. Levels of activity for next year (1997/98) have not yet been decided.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Local Offices (Hampshire)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were in receipt of family credit in each Benefits Agency office in Hampshire in 1993 and in each subsequent year. [3353]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of family credit is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John Denham, dated 13 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people were in receipt of Family Credit (FC) in each Benefits Agency (BA) office in Hampshire in 1993 and in each subsequent year.

The information is not available in the format requested. Family Credit is administered centrally by the Family Credit Unit. As such, statistics are produced on a national basis. Statistics are available which provide the number of families in receipt of FC within a BA office area at a given date. However, this only serves as a "snap-shot" at that given date and does not provide details of the number of families in receipt of FC annually.

The details for offices within the Hampshire area are shown in the attached Annex. For your information, the most recent scan has also been included.

I hope you find this reply useful.

Families in receipt of Family Credit at that date

BA Office	*28 May 1993*	*15 April 1994*	*13 April 1995*	*12 April 1996*	*10 October 1996*
Aldershot	1,541	2,080	2,231	2,089	2,127
Andover	570	589	770	974	1,131
Basingstoke	726	843	946	1,088	1,181
Fareham	1,084	1,282	1,443	1,847	2,040
New Forest	692	896	1,024	1,257	1310
Portsmouth North	1,243	1,524	1,653	2,047	2253

BA Office	Families in receipt of Family Credit at that date				
	28 May 1993	15 April 1994	13 April 1995	12 April 1996	10 October 1996
Portsmouth South	372	439	526	686	758
Southampton	1,803	2,051	2,292	2,590	2735
Winchester	655	766	840	961	1011

Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

Benefits Agency (Emergency Services)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many Benefits Agency offices provide out-of-hours services; and what proposals he has for the future of this provision. [3262]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 13 November 1996

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many Benefits Agency (BA) offices provide out-of hours-services; and what proposals he has for the future of this provision.

The Out of Hours Service (OOHS) is provided on an area basis rather than by individual BA offices and all 13 Area Directorates provide this service.

We are currently undertaking a review of the OOHS. A consultation exercise to assess the impact of a reduction or withdrawal of the OOHS was conducted during August and early September. The results of the exercise are now being evaluated and all issues will be considered before a decision on the future of the service is made. It is anticipated that this decision will be made by the end of the year.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Job Seeker's Allowance

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what provisions exist within the job seeker's allowance to aid job seekers hampered by the absence of suitable public transport to areas of potential employment. [4054]

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. J. L. Grover to Miss Emma Nicholson, dated 14 November 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me, in the absence of the Chief Executive, to reply to your question about what provisions exist within Jobseeker's Allowance to aid jobseekers hampered by the absence of public transport to areas of potential employment.

Travel to work arrangements and costs are a matter for individuals and their employer. There is no provision under Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) to cover such costs.

However, we have been running the Travel to Interview Scheme for a number of years to help unemployed people cope with the expense of getting to job interviews. The scheme does this by helping people who have been unemployed more than 13 weeks with travelling costs, and if necessary, overnight accommodation costs to attend job interviews outside their usual travel to work area. A few simple conditions must be met before assistance can be granted, to ensure the scheme is properly and fairly administered and gives good value for money. In the last year the scheme has helped nearly 47,000 applicants with travelling costs totalling £1.7m.

I hope this is helpful.

EDS Ltd.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many contracts his Department, agencies and associated bodies have had with EDS for each year since 1985; what was the value of each contract; if he will indicate for each contract *(a)* if it was completed, *(b)* what modifications were made at the request of (i) the company and (ii) the Department and *(c)* if work under contract is being undertaken in-house; and if he will make a statement on the number of job reductions in his Department arising from the contracting out of work by EDS. [3812]

Mr. Willetts: The information requested is not available before 1990. Since 1990, the Cabinet Office (Office of Public Service), its agencies and associated bodies have had two contracts with EDS. The first contract was worth £2,744 and *(a)* is completed, *(b)* no modifications were made, and *(c)* no work was undertaken under contract in-house. The second has no guaranteed value and *(a)* is on-going, *(b)* no modifications to date have been made at the request of either the company or the Department, and *(c)* no work is undertaken under contract in-house. Neither contract has resulted in job reductions in the Department.

Government Policy Co-ordination

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of his departmental costs is attributable to the co-ordination of Government policy. [1309]

Mr. Willetts: The co-ordination of Government policy is a ministerial activity. No costs are incurred in specifically supporting my right hon. Friend in this area.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what estimate Her Majesty's Government have made of the cost of implementation of the working time directive for central Government employees; and what is his most recent calculation of the cost of implementing the rules governing the 48-hour working week for central Government employees. [4089]

Mr. Freeman: The cost of implementing the provisions of the EU working time directive for central Government as a whole has not been calculated. In the main, civil servants have terms and conditions of employment, and work hours, which do not conflict with the provisions of the directive. It is for individual Departments and agencies to assess the effects in their own areas.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what are the latest estimates of the expenditure on external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [4066]

Mr. Willetts: This answer refers to expenditure by the Cabinet Office, including No.10, the Office of Public Service and its agencies, the Civil Service College, Chessington Computer Centre (CCC), Recruitment and Assessment Service (RAS) and the Occupational Health and Safety Agency (OHSA), and my other Departments, Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO) and the Central Office of Information.

HMSO, and three of the Department's agencies, CCC, RAS and OHSA, have been privatised during the present financial year, the answer covers their expenditure up to the date of privatisation.

	Cabinet Office/OPS and agencies	*HMSO*	*COI*
1992–93	6,755,403	451,463	150,174
1993–94	6,327,812	1,130,994	71,100
1994–95	6,250,950	1,833,396	169,862
1995–96	4,077,649	845,608	149,872
1996–97[1]	5,368,723	359,500	47,115

[1] Current financial year to 30 September 1996. Includes privatised agencies up to date of privatisation.

Consultants are not primarily used to achieve cost savings. The Department uses consultants to assist in the improvement of its operational efficiency and effectiveness, for example by better use of information technology, and to improve the delivery of Government programmes by drawing on expertise from the private sector. The benefits achieved are difficult to express in terms of cost savings. It is estimated that savings of £3 million to £4 million will be achieved following implementation of consultants' recommendations in the forthcoming year.

HEALTH

Prescribed Drugs (Adverse Reactions)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated since 1990 into the relationship between the numbers of elderly people admitted to hospital and the use of prescribed drugs; and if he will make a statement. [2891]

Mr. Horam: None.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many elderly *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been admitted to hospital in the United Kingdom as a consequence of an adverse reaction to (i) non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, (ii) phenothiazines, (iii) diuretics, (iv) analgesics, (v) night sedation, (vi) digoxin, (vii) laxatives, (viii) corticosteroids, (ix) beta blockers and (x) aminophylline in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [2892]

Mr. Horam: Figures on admissions relating to specific groups of drugs are not available centrally. The information that is available, which has been derived from the hospital episode statistics, has been placed in the Library.

Questions about hospital admissions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of, and how many, elderly people have been admitted to hospital in the United Kingdom for (i) postural hypertension, (ii) renal failure, (iii) dehydration and (iv) electrolyte imbalance as a direct result of taking prescribed diuretics in each of the last five years broken down by *(a)* gender and *(b)* age bands of 10 years, starting at 60 years; and if he will make a statement. [2880]

Mr. Horam: It is not possible to identify data relating specifically to prescribed drugs. The information available on admission in these categories where there is also a mention of diuretics has been placed in the Library.

Questions about hospital admissions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of, and how many, people have been admitted to hospital in the United Kingdom for (i) acute gastrointestinal bleed and (ii) anaemia through chronic GI bleed as a direct result of taking aspirin in each of the last five years broken down by *(a)* gender and *(b)* age bands of 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [2881]

Mr. Horam: The information available, which is derived from the hospital episode statistics, has been placed in the Library.

Questions about hospital admissions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS of treating people admitted to hospital due to an adverse reaction to prescribed drugs in each of the last five years broken down by age bands of 10 years. [2887]

Mr. Horam: The information is not available centrally.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of, and how many, people admitted to hospital in the United Kingdom, have been suffering adverse reactions to a prescribed drug in each of the last five years and in age bands of 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [2903]

Mr. Horam: It is not possible to identify information relating specifically to prescribed drugs. The information that is available, which is derived from the hospital episode statistics, has been placed in the Library.

Questions about hospital admissions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Tay-Sachs Disease

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals his Department has to make progress towards a treatment for Tay–Sachs disease. [3060]

Mr. Horam: A major part of the biomedical research in this country and abroad is directed towards a better understanding of metabolic diseases, such as Tay-Sachs. The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. Unfortunately, no treatment for Tay-Sachs has been discovered as yet.

Health Variations

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action, supported with what new resources, he has taken to implement the recommendations of the variations sub-group of the chief medical officer's "The Health of the Nation" working group report on variations in health published on 23 October 1995. [3533]

Mr. Horam: Priorities and planning guidance issued to the national health service since the publication of the variations report asks health authorities to address variations in health, directly and through collaborating with others. The NHS executive has developed a framework to monitor health authorities' progress on improving their populations' health, as part of its general performance management. The Department has also commissioned a consultation exercise to inform the content of a £2.4 million research initiative on health variations, which will be launched shortly.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies have been commissioned by his Department to assess the relationship between poverty and ill health since 1979; and which of these studies have been published. [3532]

Mr. Horam: In October 1995, the Department of Health published a report on variations in health which reviews the available evidence on socio–economic and other variations in the five areas covered by the Government's health of the nation strategy. We are shortly to launch a £2.4 million research strategy on variations in health, including variations relating to socio–economic status.

Liver Cancer

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statistics his Department collates in respect of the proportion of primary liver cancers caused by hepatitis B; and if he will make a statement. [3418]

Mr. Horam: There are no reliable national data on the proportion of primary liver cancers that are associated with chronic hepatitis B infection in the United Kingdom. Data collected on primary liver cancer are not broken down by specific cause.

Nutritional Standards

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department issues regarding nutritional standards of food for school-age children; and if he will make a statement. [3421]

Mr. Horam: A sub-group of the nutrition task force is currently working on voluntary guidance for school providers. The guidance is due for publication early in 1997 and has been the result of a joint initiative between this department, the Department for Education and Employment, the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and a project team comprising key individuals with an interest in the area.

Care in the Community

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance he has issued to local councils and health authorities to co-ordinate their services to care for mentally ill patients in the community; and if he will make a statement; [3588]

(2) if he will list the principal guidance notes issued by his Department relating to the provision of care in the community. [3764]

Mr. Burns: Since 1990, the Department has issued the following guidance relating to the provision of care in the community for mentally ill people:

"Caring for People, The Care Programme Approach for people with a mental illness referred to the specialist psychiatric services" (HC(90)23/LASSL(90)11);

"The Health of the Nation Mental Illness Key Area Handbook" (1993);

"Introduction of supervision registers for mentally ill people from 1 April 1994" (HSG(94)5);

"Guidance on the discharge of mentally disordered people and their continuing care in the community" (HSG(94)27);

"Guidance on supervised discharge (after-care under supervision) and related provision" (HSG(96)11);

"Building Bridges" (1995);

"The Spectrum of Care" (1996);

"24 Hour Nursed Care for People with Severe and Enduring Mental Illness" (1996).

Copies of these are available in the Library.

Most of these documents include guidance on the co-ordination of services for people with mental illness. "Building Bridges" contains specific advice on inter-agency working for the care and protection of severely mentally ill people. A consultation document on mental health services will shortly be issued and further guidance may be issued in the light of responses.

Health Service Ombudsman

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions in each of the last five years the health service ombudsman has found against a health authority or trust. [3935]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally. Statistics on complaints investigated by the health service commissioner are included in his annual reports, copies of which are placed in the Library.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the value of capital expenditure undertaken by national health service trusts in each financial year since 1990–91. [3824]

Mr. Horam: The total national health service capital expenditure in England for 1991–92, 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95 is set out in the table.

A figure for 1990–91 cannot be given as NHS trusts were not established until the following financial year.

The audited figures for 1995–96 are not yet available.

The definition of capital has changed during this period; therefore comparisons between years cannot readily be made. For 1993–94, the threshold value for the definition of capital expenditure was increased from £1,000 to £5,000. As a result of this change, in 1993–94, over £100 million was transferred from capital to revenue to take account of the increase to the capital threshold.

Financial year	*NHS trust capital expenditure £000*
1991–92	223,515
1992–93	625,090
1993–94	1,098,769
1994–95	1,631,122

Plymouth and Torbay Community Health Councils

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to make a statement about the merger of the Plymouth and Torbay community health councils. [3948]

Mr. Horam: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met a delegation of representatives from Plymouth and District community health council on 23 October. A separate meeting with representatives of Torbay community health council is scheduled for 18 November, following which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be in a position to respond to the representations which have been put to him.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is collected centrally on the long-term revenue commitments arising as a result of private finance initiative deals agreed by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* NHS trusts. [4000]

Mr. Horam: There are no private finance initiative deals yet entered into by the Department of Health itself. Information is not collected centrally on all commitments entered into by NHS trusts arising from private finance initiative projects.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many requests for information the NHS superannuation scheme has received from pension providers undertaking reviews of pension transfers and opt-outs; in how many cases all appropriate information has been supplied; what is the average length of time taken to supply such information; and what moratorium has been introduced on supplying such information. [3347]

Mr. Horam: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the NHS Pensions Agency under its chief executive, Mr. A. F. Cowan. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from A. F. Cowan to Mr. John Denham, dated 14 November 1996:

I am replying to the questions you have raised about requests from pension providers who are undertaking reviews of pension transfers and opt outs involving NHS employees.

This Agency has received 14,300 requests for information concerning NHS employees. We have received an additional 1,200 where there is no dispute about restitution of service. We have returned 575 questionnaires and provided 200 reinstatement costs calculations; 89 cases proceeded to actual reinstatement.

Because the Agency depends on NHS employers for up to date payroll data it can take between 3 to 8 weeks to complete questionnaires.

There is no formal moratorium in supplying information to pension providers. Cases are being dealt with on an ad hoc basis but in common with other public service schemes we have had to take special powers to resource the work. The legislation was made on 14 October 1996. We expect to commence systematic clearance of questionnaires in the next few weeks.

If you require any further information, please let me know.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Jobseeker's Allowance

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what reduction in public expenditure she estimates will ensue from the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance in the first full year of operation. [3286]

Mr. Forth: It is estimated that, in a full year, the introduction of JSA will produce direct benefit savings of £240 million. No estimates have been made of savings which might accrue from behavioural changes as a result of JSA.

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were the costs incurred by her Department in publicising the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance in each region. [3927]

Mr. Forth: The costs incurred up to 31 October 1996 were £500,205, and related mainly to national publicity for jobseekers and external groups. This figure includes costs incurred by the Department, the Department for Social Security, the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency.

Class Sizes

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many classes in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary education there are with over 30 pupils; what were the figures in 1979; and what has been the percentage change. [3883]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Number of classes of 31 or more pupils taught by one teacher in maintained primary and secondary schools

England

Position in January in each year (1979 and 1996)

	1979	*1996*	*Percentage change*
Primary	44,899	38,338	–14.6
Secondary[1]	17,255	7,351	–57.4

[1] Excludes pupils in sixth form colleges which ceased to be classified as schools in April 1993.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her estimate of the cost of reducing to a maximum of 30 maintained infant and primary school classes for pupils aged between five and 11 years. [3881]

Mr. Squire: The Department's statisticians estimate that it would have cost between £310 million and £570 million to reduce to a maximum of 30 pupils all single-teacher nursery and primary classes in January 1996. The exact cost would depend on the extent to which children in larger classes could be accommodated in existing smaller classes or grouped together in new classes. The estimated costs are for extra teachers only, and make no allowance for further costs such as extra accommodation.

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the *(a)* pupil—teacher ratio in each year and *(b)* the expenditure per pupil in each year since 1980. [3882]

Mr. Squire: The available information is shown in the following table:

Pupil: teacher ratio and expenditure per pupil for maintained nursery, primary and secondary[1] schools

England

1979–1980 to 1995–1996

Financial year	*Overall pupil: teacher ratio[2]*	*Expenditure[3,4] per pupil (£)*
1979–1980	18.7	513
1980–1981	18.6	651
1981–1982	18.5	740
1982–1983	18.1	811
1983–1984	17.9	872
1984–1985	17.8	924
1985–1986	17.6	991
1986–1987	17.3	1,110
1987–1988	17.0	1,238
1988–1989	17.0	1,361
1989–1990	17.0	1,487
1990–1991	17.2	1,623
1991–1992	17.2	1,749
1992–1993	17.7	1,857
1993–1994	18.1	1,866
1994–1995	18.3	1,890
1995–1996	18.5	n/a

[1] Excludes sixth form colleges from 1993–1994.
[2] Position in January.
[3] Net institutional expenditure in cash terms.
[4] Includes LEA maintained schools only.
n/a = not available.

Truancy

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of truancy rates at grant-maintained schools relative to those at other schools. [3888]

Mr. Forth: Rates of unauthorised absence at different categories of schools in the 1994–95 school year are set out in the following table. As in previous years, rates of unauthorised absence were significantly lower at grant-maintained schools. Data for the 1995–96 school year will be published shortly.

Unauthorised absence by type of school in England in the 1994–95 school year

Type of school	*Percentage of half days missed*	*Average number of half days missed per absent pupil*
Maintained primary schools[1]		
County and voluntary controlled	0.5	11
Voluntary aided and special agreement	0.4	10
Grant-maintained	0.3	8
Average for maintained primary schools	0.5	10
Maintained secondary schools[2]		
County and voluntary controlled	1.2	22
Voluntary aided and special agreement	0.8	21
Grant-maintained	0.5	17
Average for maintained secondary schools	1.0	22
Special Schools	2.5	27
CTCs	0.2	8
Independent schools	0.1	8
England average	0.7	15

Notes:
[1] Includes middle deemed primary schools
[2] Includes middle deemed secondary schools
Source:
DfEE National Pupil Absence Tables 1995.

Employment Service

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place in the Library a copy of the material prepared by the consultants Ernst and Young for the Employment Service, prior to the recent announcement about reductions in activity at the service headquarters. [3918]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Grover to Mr. David Blunkett, dated 14 November 1996:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me, in the absence of the Chief Executive, to reply to your question on whether a copy of the Ernst and Young material associated with the Review of the Employment Service Headquarters will be placed in the Library of the House.

You may find it helpful to have some background on the work. The Chief Executive commissioned the consultants Ernst and Young to help the Employment Service (ES) Board think through issues concerning the future role of our Headquarters (Head Office and nine Regional Offices) and to develop an overview of the type of Headquarters the Agency would need. We accomplished this through a series of workshops of ES Board members and senior managers, facilitated by the consultants, who provided advice and fact-finding based on their work in organisations elsewhere. Our aim is to now draw on that work to inform more detailed change projects over the next three years.

The consultants did not submit a formal report to the Board. However, I set out the key strands of our thinking and proposals for further work below.

ES's field operations have previously been subject to rigorous examination of need, effectiveness and cost. The Agency has become smaller as unemployment has fallen and it is now appropriate to apply a similar approach to our HQ functions;

our examination concluded that the ES could be managed better and more cost effectively by eliminating duplication of functions between Head and Regional Offices which lead to reworking and loss of economies of scale; improving our Headquarter business processes; and contracting out some support functions;

this had led us to develop a blueprint for ES Headquarters of a small directing and enabling head office and a regional management tier focusing on the delivery of services to our clients;

to realise this, the Chief Executive has commissioned more detailed work to reduce Headquarters activities in areas not directly related to delivery of services to our clients; rebrigade (possibly to single sites) a number of support functions, and actively explore the scope for contracting out a number of support functions.

I hope this is helpful in giving more information on what we are seeking to achieve.

School Funding

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans the Government have to preserve the per capita funding required by schools in sparsely populated areas to deliver an equivalent standard of services to that provided by urban schools. [4055]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will be making a statement on the Government's plans for the distribution of funding between local authorities in 1997–98, shortly after the budget. Local authorities will continue to be responsible for distributing funds between schools in their areas.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the latest estimates of the expenditure on external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [4063]

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to him on 17 October 1996, *Official Report*, column *1130*.

National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many different national vocational qualifications are currently available; and of these which have *(a)* never been awarded and *(b)* been awarded to only one person. [3593]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* I am informed by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications that 843 national vocational qualifications were accredited by them at 30 June 1996. A total of 351 of these had not, at that date, attracted full awards and 39 had attracted one award. Individual NVQs are subject to accreditation at regular intervals, and, given the time it takes after accreditation for awards to become available to centres, and individuals to train towards them, at any one time a considerable proportion of individual NVQs will have attracted few awards. Of those awards available at March 1996 and which were accredited before April 1993, 38 had attracted no awards.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Abortion Legislation

12. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent representations he has received about applying the abortion legislation which applies in the rest of the United Kingdom to Northern Ireland. [2524]

Mr. Moss: In the six months from May to October of this year, there have been 29 representations from the public and one hon. Member opposing the application to Northern Ireland of the abortion legislation which applies in the rest of the United Kingdom. No representations supporting the application were received.

Construction Industry

13. **Mr. Clifford Forsythe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the employment situation within the construction industry in Northern Ireland. [2525]

Mr. Moss: At June 1996, there were 22,430 employees in employment in construction in Northern Ireland, which is some 3.9 per cent. of total employees. This is a decrease of 230 employees (–1 per cent.) over the quarter and 930 (–4 per cent.) over the year. The most up-to-date information on the number of self-employed workers in the industry is from the 1991 census of population, at which time the figure stood at 13,970. The number of unemployed claimants indicating the construction industry as their usual source of employment was 14,310 as at September 1996.

Inward Investment

14. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about inward investment in Northern Ireland. [2527]

Mr. Ancram: The year ended 31 March 1996 was the best ever year for inward investment in Northern Ireland, with 35 projects secured, offering 4,869 new jobs and representing total investment of £432 million—a 55 per cent. increase in jobs promoted on the previous year. This confirms the increasing interest shown in Northern Ireland as an investment location.

Schools Investment, Strangford

15. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what major capital investments in schools in the constituency of Strangford are scheduled for the next financial year. [2528]

Mr. Ancram: The school building programme for the next financial year has yet to be determined.

Tourism

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the latest trends in the number of tourists visiting Northern Ireland. [2529]

Mr. Ancram: Estimates by the Northern Ireland tourist board suggest that some 1,385,000 visitors will come to Northern Ireland during 1996, contributing some £202 million in tourism revenue. Of these, around 345,000, or 25 per cent. will be holiday visitors. These figures represent falls of 11 per cent., 6 per cent. and 25 per cent. respectively over the record levels of 1995, but all remain above 1994 pre-ceasefire levels.

Next Steps Agencies

17. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to increase the number of next steps agencies in Northern Ireland. [2530]

Sir John Wheeler: There are currently 24 next steps agencies in Northern Ireland. Prior options studies are taking place in relation to a further nine executive activities which are potential agency candidates. The decision as to whether these activities should be conducted by agencies will depend on the conclusions of the prior options analyses.

Heterosexual Age of Consent

18. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the Government's policy regarding the reduction of Northern Ireland's heterosexual age of consent to the age of consent applying in mainland Britain. [2531]

Sir John Wheeler: The age of consent for women in Northern Ireland is 17 years—one year older than in Great Britain. The age of consent was 16 years until 1950 when, following the recommendation of an independent report, the Government of Northern Ireland raised it to 17 years.

I am aware of no significant body of opinion in Northern Ireland arguing for the reduction of the age of consent to 16 years.

Issues such as the age of consent are essentially matters of conscience and are best dealt with on the initiative of private Members.

Irish Republican Army

19. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress he has made towards securing a declaration of a permanent cessation of violence by the Irish Republican Army. [2532]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: It is not for the Government to petition the IRA for a cessation of violence. Such violence is repugnant and wholly without justification. A democratic process of dialogue designed to reach agreement on a broadly acceptable way forward for Northern Ireland is in place and is on offer to Sinn Fein. It knows what needs to happen for it to be able to take part.

Religious Education

20. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to reform religious education in Northern Ireland schools; and if he will make a statement. [2533]

Mr. Ancram: I have no plans to reform religious education in Northern Ireland schools.

Employment and Training

21. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to meet trade union and business leaders in order to discuss employment and training issues. [2534]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for this subject has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 12 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency to reply to your question about proposals to meet trade union and business leaders in order to discuss with them employment and training issues.

You will be interested to know that I meet regularly with both trade union and business leaders to discuss a wide range of employment and training issues. I have had recent meetings with representatives of the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors and the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry. In September, I hosted a dinner in Londonderry in honour of Mr. John Monks, General Secretary, TUC and which was attended by senior trade union and business leaders. The Agency also has a very close working relationship with the Northern Ireland Growth Challenge through its Education, Training and Employment Sub-committee. Two members of the Agency's Board are trade union representatives.

In Northern Ireland, employers' training interests are represented by 16 industry led Sector Training Councils with which we also work closely. Incidentally, the Agency is currently working in partnership with the Engineering Training Council to support the "Year of Engineering Success" in 1997.

The Agency will continue to meet regularly with trade union and business leaders.

Peace Process

22. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the latest position on the peace process in Northern Ireland. [2535]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Members for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) and for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) earlier today.

Security Situation

23. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland. [2536]

Sir John Wheeler: As the new Chief Constable said recently, the Provisional IRA has shown that it is prepared to prolong the misery and suffering, but the security forces will do all in their power to deter terrorist attacks. Following the bomb in Thiepval barracks, the security forces immediately re-introduced such security measures as were considered appropriate. In particular, there has been an increase in Army patrolling and snap vehicle checkpoints are being set up in many areas around Northern Ireland. In addition, some town barriers are closed at night and vigilance has been heightened.

Water and Sewerage Charges

24. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received on the levels of water and sewerage charges to customers in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [2537]

Mr. Moss: Since 1 April 1996, representations have been received from 15 sources. They are a district councillor, 11 district councils, the Association of Local Authorities of Northern Ireland, the Ulster Farmers Union and a public sector company. In responding to all representations made, the Department explained that, in line with Government policy, it was committed to moving progressively towards charges fully reflecting supply costs.

Primary Health Care

25. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to encourage research and development in primary health care in Northern Ireland. [2538]

Mr. Moss: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 31 October, *Official Report*, column *258*.

Irish Language

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what new proposals he has to improve the teaching of the Irish language in Northern Ireland educational institutions. [2518]

Mr. Ancram: As part of our continuing support for Irish-medium schools, I have asked the education and library boards to co-operate in establishing a new unit to prepare teaching materials for use in Irish-medium schools and to provide a central source of Irish-medium expertise to support schools on a Province-wide basis.

Mr. Colin Duffey

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the Royal Ulster Constabary following the quashing of Mr. Colin Duffey's conviction; and if he will make a statement. [2519]

Sir John Wheeler: My right hon. and learned Friend has had no reason to discuss the case with the Royal Ulster Constabulary, nor is it customary for the Government to make statements about the outcome of criminal cases.

Animal Blood

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Departments of Health and Social Security and Agriculture have approved the spreading of animal blood on fields; and if he will make a statement. [2445]

Mr. Ancram: The practice of spreading blood on land as a fertiliser is an acceptable method of disposal.

The feeding of animal protein to ruminants is prohibited under the Specified Bovine Material (No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 1996. Spreading of blood on land while livestock are grazing it, or moving livestock unto such land shortly after spreading, would be in contravention of the order as the livestock could ingest animal protein.

The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, which is the independent committee of experts that advises the Government on matters relating to BSE, has confirmed that disposal of blood on land, other than by burial, is acceptable.

Prescribed Drugs (Adverse Effects)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many elderly *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been admitted to hospital in Northern Ireland as a consequence of an adverse reaction to (i) non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, (ii) phenothiazines, (iii) diuretics, (iv) analgesics, (v) night sedation, (vi) digoxin, (viii) laxatives, (viii) corticosteroids, (ix) beta blockers and (x) aminophylline in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [2906]

Mr. Moss: The table gives the number of patients aged 65 years or over who were recorded as admitted to hospital in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years with a recorded adverse reaction in terms of the categories requested.

When interpreting these figures, it should be noted that they are likely to understate the incidence of adverse reaction because this is not always recorded, particularly in earlier years, in the level of detail required by the question.

	1991–92		*1992–93*		*1993–94*		*1994–95*		*1995–96*		
	M	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	
NSAIDs[1]	0	1	1	4	1	1	1	1	1	4	NSAIDS
Phenothiazines	1	2	1	6	3	1	4	2	5	3	Phenothiazines
Diuretics	5	6	7	4	6	21	8	23	9	20	Diuretics

	1991–92		1992–93		1993–94		1994–95		1995–96		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Analgesics	2	5	3	3	2	8	8	14	9	18	Analgesics
Night Sedation[2]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	Night Sedation
Digoxin	1	8	5	14	7	7	9	20	7	25	Diogoxin
Laxatives[3]	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	Laxatives
Corticosteriods	0	1	0	3	2	2	2	7	4	7	Corticosteriods
Beta Blockers	3	2	3	3	3	12	9	14	22	27	Beta Blockers
Aminophyline	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	Aminophyline

Source: Hospital Inpatients System (Figures for 1995–96 provisional)
Owing to non-specific information requested, 1,2,3 have had to be interpreted as follows:
[1] NSAIDs: Figures given refer to recorded adverse reaction to anti-inflamatory drugs (ICD9 E946.0).
[2] Night Sedation: Figures given refer to recorded adverse reaction to sleeping pillos (ICD9 E937.9).
[3] Laxatives: Figures given refer to recorded adverse reaction to mineral oil laxative (ICD9 E943.2).

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of, and how many, people admitted to hospital in Northern Ireland have been suffering from adverse reactions to a prescribed drug in each of the last five years and in age bands of 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [2908]

Mr. Moss: The information requested is set out in the tables.

When interpreting these figures, it should be noted that they are likely to understate the incidence of adverse reaction because this is not always recorded, particularly in earlier years, in the level of detail required by the question.

Age group	Total discharges and deaths	D and Ds from adverse reaction to drugs	Percentage
1991–92			
0 to 9	41,113	13	0.03
10 to 19	23,233	9	0.04
20 to 29	47,852	12	0.03
30 to 39	38,509	16	0.04
40 to 49	31,359	22	0.07
50 to 59	31,531	24	0.08
60 to 69	39,127	41	0.10
70 to 79	37,164	41	0.11
80 to 89	19,459	19	0.10
90+	2,689	4	0.15
Total	312,036	201	0.06
1992–93			
0 to 9	45,218	21	0.05
10 to 19	23,067	9	0.04
20 to 29	48,532	22	0.05
30 to 39	40,188	16	0.04
40 to 49	31,342	36	0.11
50 to 59	33,626	41	0.12
60 to 69	41,710	55	0.13
70 to 79	38,954	78	0.20
80 to 89	20,126	42	0.21
90+	2,775	6	0.22
Total	325,538	326	0.10
1993–94			
0 to 9	48,444	123	0.05
10 to 19	23,536	16	0.07
20 to 29	46,154	39	0.08
30 to 39	42,987	34	0.08
40 to 49	33,208	42	0.13
50 to 59	36,844	61	0.13
60 to 69	45,215	78	0.17
70 to 79	43,943	93	0.21
80 to 89	22,480	53	0.24
90+	3,082	9	0.29
Total	345,893	448	0.13
1994–95			
0 to 9	55,841	18	0.03
10 to 19	25,696	20	0.08
20 to 29	52,870	39	0.07
30 to 39	51,756	47	0.09
40 to 49	37,831	47	0.12
50 to 59	41,445	58	0.14
60 to 69	49,006	98	0.20
70 to 79	48,664	135	0.28
80 to 89	24,985	80	0.32
90+	3,398	14	0.41
Total	391,492	556	0.14
1995–96			
0 to 09	62,837	21	0.03
10 to 19	26,388	40	0.15
20 to 29	51,738	57	0.11
30 to 39	54,393	72	0.13
40 to 49	39,791	64	0.16
50 to 59	42,724	118	0.28
60 to 69	50,719	150	0.30
70 to 79	51,460	166	0.32
80 to 89	26,496	120	0.45
90+	3,797	20	0.53
Total	410,343	828	0.20

Preparations

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the average *(a)* number of types and *(b)* quantity of preparations taken by people in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years broken down by (i) gender and (ii) age bands of 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [2886]

Mr. Moss: No estimate has been made.

Education and Library Boards

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken to ensure that each compulsory competitive tendering contract involving the education and library boards in Northern Ireland adheres to policy appraisal and fair treatment guidelines. [2759]

Mr. Ancram: The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 precludes education and library boards from taking account of non-commercial matters in conducting any contracting activities.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the cost of the planning and preparation work he has proposed to be undertaken before 1 April 1998 for the introduction of his proposals to change the education and library boards. [3598]

Mr. Ancram: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 7 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *674*.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what resettlement grants staff affected by his proposals for changing education and library boards and the regionalisation of board services will be eligible for; and what estimate he has made of the costs of such grants. [3599]

Mr. Ancram: Under their terms and conditions of service, education and library board staff may be eligible for excess travel or removal expenses. It is not possible to estimate the cost involved in advance of detailed planning for the new structures and the identification of those individuals both affected by the reorganisation and eligible for such expenses.

Ex-offenders (Rehabilitation)

Ms Mowlem: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the rehabilitation programmes available in Northern Ireland for ex-offenders and the numbers of people who participated in them in each of the last five years. [2789]

Sir John Wheeler: Information is not available in the form requested. However, in addition to pre-release programmes within the prisons and a full range of public services which are open to all citizens, there is available within the community a wide spectrum of programmes specifically for ex-offenders and persons at risk of offending. These are operated either directly by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland or by voluntary and community bodies to which, in 1995–96, it paid grants totalling over £2 million. The board itself, as part of its on-going activities, runs programmes for its clients on a range of themes including cognitive skills, alcohol management, sexual abuse, domestic violence and other forms of violent behaviour.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the impact of the decision of the Royal Group of Hospitals announced on 30 October in relation to surgical operations on the waiting lists for various procedures for the Down Health and Social Services Lisburn trust area. [2760]

Mr. Moss: As a result of the budget savings which were required this year to meet priority developments, fewer elective surgical operations will take place and waiting lists and times will therefore increase to some extent. However, this must be judged in the context of the enormous inroads which have been made into waiting lists and waiting times since 1992. For example, in that year, about 3,000 patients were waiting two years or more for admission. In March this year, virtually nobody was waiting more than two years, while 800 were waiting more than 18 months. The number of patients treated has risen continually over the same period from a total of 330,000 ordinary admissions and day cases in 1991–92 to approximately 400,000 approximately in 1995–96.

School Leavers

Ms Mowlem: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of school leavers in Northern Ireland, who went into higher education, went to establishments in *(a)* Northern Ireland, *(b)* Great Britain, *(c)* the Republic of Ireland and *(d)* elsewhere in each of the last five years. [2788]

Mr. Ancram: The percentage of school leavers in Northern Ireland who went to higher education in each of the last five years to establishments in Northern Ireland, Great Britain and elsewhere is as follows:

	Northern Ireland	*Great Britain*	*Elsewhere*
1990–91	62.5	34.3	3.2
1991–92	59.0	36.8	4.2
1992–93	59.4	36.1	4.6
1993–94	57.4	35.5	7.0
1994–95	61.0	34.0	5.0

[1] Information on school leavers who went into higher education in the Republic of Ireland is not collected separately.

Drug Seizures

Ms Mowlem: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the seizures of drugs by *(a)* type and *(b)* quantity in Northern Ireland (i) at ports, (ii) at the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and (iii) elsewhere in each of the last five years. [2790]

Sir John Wheeler: Details of drug seizures are held as a total, by type of drug, for each year; these figures are set out below. It is not possible to specify where seizures were made.

Drugs seized in Northern Ireland 1991–95

Drugs seized	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Cannabis					
Resin (kgs)	37.5	15.75	44.5	81.9	160.7
Herbal (kgs)	1.5	—	—	7.1	0.104
Plants	19	—	419	66	634
Oil (gms)	—	—	—	—	130
Cocaine					
(gms)	88	77	19	1,092	322
Wraps	—	—	—	—	7
Opiates (inc. Heroin)					
(gms)	—	20	363	34	8
Tablets	—	—	—	—	—
Twists	—	—	—	—	—
Doses	250	57	—	—	—
LSD					
Trips	800	9,201	8,022	15,392	8,761
Microdots	—	—	—	92	—
Fake	—	—	—	900	—

Drugs seized in Northern Ireland 1991–95

Drugs seized	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
MDMA (Ecstasy)					
Tablets	2,711	4,408	2,923	23,853	136,860
Capsules	—	—	—	—	—
Powder (gms)	—	—	—	168	—
Amphetamines					
Powder (gms)	625	5,732	—	7,700	6,138
Tablets	25	—	—	242	816
Wraps	—	—	—	2,858	782
Doses	—	—	1,728	—	—
Speedballs	—	—	—	200	—

Planning Guidelines

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what evaluation his Department has made of the capacity of the planning system to absorb a new *(a)* low impact and *(b)* permaculture use class into existing guidelines; and what assessment he has made of the advantages of this policy. [3366]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Planning Service under its chief executive, Mr. T. W. Stewart. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from T.W. Stewart to Mr. Martyn Jones, dated 13 November 1996:

Mr. Moss has asked me to reply to your question about an evaluation of the capacity of the planning system to absorb (a) low impact and (b) permaculture use class into existing guidelines; and what assessment has been made of the advantages of this policy.

The Planning Service has made no such evaluation or assessment. We will, however, monitor the outcome of any evaluation undertaken in the rest of the United Kingdom, and assess what relevance, if any, it may have for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to review (a) PPG7 and (b) other planning guidance on agricultural and other dwellings in the countryside in order to give greater weight to environmental and social sustainability; and if he will make a statement. [3380]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Planning Service under its chief executive Mr. T. W. Stewart. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from T. W. Stewart to Mr. Martyn Jones, dated 13 November 1996:

Mr. Moss has asked me to reply to your Question about a review of PPG 7 and other planning guidance on agricultural and other dwellings in the countryside in order to give greater weight to environmental and social sustainability.

PPG 7 does not extend to Northern Ireland. The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland's planning policy for rural areas is set out in the publication "A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland", published in September 1993, which seeks to give effect to environmental and social sustainability principles, at the same time meeting the needs of a strong dispersed rural community. Copies of this publication are available in the Library. The Planning Service intends commencing a formal review of the Strategy in the year 2000, and in carrying out the review, will take into account guidance available elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research his Department has *(a)* planned, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* evaluated into the advantages of establishing a permaculture use class within the planning system; and if he will make a statement. [3376]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Planning Service under its chief executive, Mr. T. W. Stewart. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from T. W. Stewart to Mr. Martyn Jones, dated 13 November 1996:

Mr. Moss has asked me to reply to your Question about research into the advantages of establishing a permaculture use class within the planning system.

The Planning Service has neither (a) planned, (b) commissioned nor (c) evaluated any such research. We will, however, monitor the outcome of any research undertaken in the rest of the United Kingdom, and assess what relevance, if any, it may have for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research his Department has *(a)* planned, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* evaluated into establishing practical criteria for assessing sustainable and low-impact developments, with particular regard to rural areas; and if he will make a statement. [3267]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Planning Service under its chief executive, Mr. T. W. Stewart. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from T. W. Stewart to Mr. Martyn Jones, dated 13 November 1996:

Mr. Moss has asked me to reply to your Question about research into the advantages of establishing practical criteria for assessing sustainable and low impact developments, with particular regard for rural areas.

You will be interested to know that the Agency's corporate aim is "to plan and manage development in ways which will contribute to a quality environment and seek to meet the economic and social aspirations of the present and future generations". Sustainability is, therefore, a crucial factor in the determination of planning applications. In addition, in May 1994, the Agency issued detailed illustrated guidance on rural design, in the form of a publication entitled "A Design Guide for Rural Northern Ireland". Copies of this publication are available in the Library.

The Planning Service has neither (a) planned, (b) commissioned nor (c) evaluated any such research. We will, however, monitor the outcome of any research undertaken in the rest of the United Kingdom, and assess what relevance, if any, it may have for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment his Department has made of the advantages of giving additional weight to environmental impact in determining planning restrictions on agricultural buildings. [3362]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Planning Service under its chief executive, Mr. T. W. Stewart. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from T. W. Stewart to Mr. Martyn Jones, dated 13 November 1996:

Mr. Moss has asked me to reply to your Question about what assessment has been made of the advantages of giving additional weight to environmental impact in determining restrictions on agricultural holdings.

The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland's planning policy for rural areas is set out in the publication "A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland", published in September 1993, which seeks to give effect to environmental impact in determining restrictions on agricultural holdings, at the same time meeting the needs of a strong rural community. Copies of this publication are available in the Library. The Planning Service intends commencing a formal review of the Strategy in the year 2000, and in carrying out the review, will take into account guidance available elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

The Planning Service has not made any such assessment. We will, however, monitor the outcome of any assessment undertaken in the rest of the United Kingdom, and assess what relevance, if any, it may have for Northern Ireland.

School Pupils, Strangford

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pupils there are at each *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school, including grammar, schools, in the constituency of Strangford; and what were the equivalent figures for each school three years ago. [3183]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows:

School name	*1995–96*	*1992–93*
(a) Strangford—Primary		
Abbey PS	590	485
Alexander Dickson PS	215	202
Andrews Memorial PS	522	496
Ballykeigle PS	59	56
Ballyvester PS	92	87
Ballywalter PS	153	135
Belvoir Park PS	394	334
Braniel PS	417	367
Cairnshill PS	474	414
Carrickmannon PS	82	78
Carrowdore PS	133	136
Castle Gardens PS	408	454
Comber PS	394	404
Cottown PS	—	27
Donaghadee PS	479	400
Greyabbey PS	70	65
Killinchy PS	243	235
Killyleagh PS	146	157
Kircubbin PS	68	59
Kirkistown PS	58	49
Leadhill PS	206	179
Londonderry PS	315	277
Lough View integrated PS	93	—
Loughries PS	89	85
Millisle PS	172	177
Moneyrea PS	136	134
Newtownards model PS	388	362
Newtownbreda PS	230	207
O'Neill memorial PS	41	40
Portaferry PS	54	42
Portavogie PS	132	161
Regent House school (Preparatory department)	165	177
St. Anne's PS	49	45
St. Finian's PS	161	208
St. Mary's PS, Portaferry	281	325
St. Mary's PS, Comber	39	35
St. Mary's PS, Ballygowan	50	66
St. Mary's PS, Kircubbin	224	224
St. Patrick's PS	104	85
Victoria PS (Newtownards)	553	567
Victora PS (Ballyhalbert)	106	105
West Winds PS	181	208
(b) Strangford—Secondary/Grammar		
Comber high school	422	487
Donaghadee high school	254	306
Glastry high school	560	528
Lagan college	933	811
Movilla high school	834	688
Regent house school	1,444	1,413
Scrabo high school	309	374
St. Columba's high school	348	373

Cottown primary school closed 31 August 1995.
Portaferry primary school transferred to integrated status 1 September 1995.
Loughview integrated primary school opened 1 September 1993.

Woodland Projects

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what further support his Department proposes to promote existing projects currently experimenting with the integration of woodland-based manufacturing economies with an increase in the planting of deciduous woodland; and what assessment he has made of the advantages of supporting existing projects. [3228]

Mr. Ancram: There are no plans to promote such projects in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research his Department has *(a)* planned, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* evaluated with regard to integrating proposals to increase deciduous woodland with the creation of woodland-based manufacturing economies; what financial commitments his Department has made in this area; and if he will make a statement. [3232]

Mr. Ancram: No research has been carried out in this area, no such research is planned, and no financial commitments have been made.

Open University

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the public expenditure in each of the past three years in support of the Open university in Northern Ireland; and how many students were enrolled with the Open university in each of these years. [3184]

Mr. Ancram: Since 1993, the Open university has been funded centrally by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The university has been unable to provide separate figures for its activities in Northern Ireland.

The total number of students enrolled with the Open university in Northern Ireland in the past three years was:

Year	*Number of students*
1994	2,685
1995	3,016
1996	3,843

Affordable Housing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the role of low-impact and self-build accommodation in the provision of affordable housing; and if he will make a statement. [3371]

Mr. Moss: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive, as part of its strategic role, assessed the role of low-impact and self-build accommodation in its recent review of the Northern Ireland housing market 1997–98 to 1999–2000. The Housing Executive intends to consult other key housing interests to determine what further contribution self-build accommodation can make in Northern Ireland.

Pensioners (Income Support)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pensioners are currently claiming income support in Northern Ireland. [2523]

Mr. Moss: The information which is available shows that, at 31 August 1996, there were 67,872 income support claimants in receipt of pensioner premiums in Northern Ireland.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimates he has made of the additional running costs of further education colleges after incorporation. [3600]

Mr. Ancram: The Department of Education is currently in discussion with the education and library boards about the level of resources to transfer to colleges on incorporation. Colleges will have to determine their staffing and operating structures in the light of available resources.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the additional expenditure to be incurred by the Department of Education as a consequence of the incorporation of the further education colleges. [3601]

Mr. Ancram: The administrative structure required within the Department as a result of the incorporation of colleges is dependent on the final shape of the legislative framework. Final decisions on the nature of the administrative arrangements cannot be made until this is known.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 1 November, *Official Report*, column *282*, on the introduction of the nursery voucher scheme, if he will provide a breakdown of the estimated expenditure of £300,000 on administrative costs on the nursery voucher scheme; how many children will be involved in each year; and what the per capita cost of administration for each voucher place will be. [3561]

Mr. Ancram: An estimated £100,000 will be spent each year on administration of the pre-school voucher scheme by the voucher company. A further breakdown is not available as the contract has not yet been finalised. An estimated 10,900 full-time equivalent pupils will be involved each year. The estimated cost of administration per full-time equivalent pupil is £9.17.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what provisions are contained in the contract with Capita for administering the nursery voucher scheme to allow its early termination; at what cost; and on what conditions. [3562]

Mr. Ancram: Details of the arrangements for terminating the pre-school voucher contract are not available as the contract for the national scheme has not yet been finalised.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what expenditure he has incurred to date in preparation for the proposed nursery voucher scheme; and on what. [3563]

Mr. Ancram: The sum of £17,000 has been spent on preparation of a pre-school curriculum by the Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment.

Handguns

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many registered owners of handguns have reported handguns lost or stolen since 1990. [2514]

Sir John Wheeler: The Chief Constable has advised me that the total number of firearms, of all categories, reported stolen in Northern Ireland between 1990 and 31 December 1995 is 455.

Separate figures are not available for stolen handguns, and details of firearms reported lost during this period could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Security Situation

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current security situation in Northern Ireland. [2522]

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) earlier today.

Organic Farming

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for each year since 1994 *(a)* what forms of financial aid was available exclusively for organic farmers in Northern Ireland, *(b)* what administrative procedures was required for its acquisition, *(c)* how much money was earmarked, *(d)* what percentage of the money annually earmarked was received by farmers in that year; and if he will make a statement. [2368]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 4 November 1996]:* No aid was available prior to 24 April 1995. Since that date, farmers have been able to apply under the organic aid scheme for financial aid covering the five-year period of conversion from conventional to organic farming. The aid provided to cover income foregone during the period of conversion.

To obtain aid, a farmer must register the land as in conversion with the UK register of organic food standards—UKROFS—or a body approved by UKROFS, and follow detailed prescriptions set out in the scheme.

The financial provision for this scheme for 1995–96 is £60,000.

To date, the scheme has attracted only one participant, but no payments have been issued.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 15 November 1996

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tea Room

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee if he will set out the costs of the reconstruction, refurbishment and re-equipment of the House of Commons Tea Room. [4374]

Sir Raymond Powell: The cost of the new serveries in the Tea Room was £85,000. The refurbishment was carried out in conjunction with the construction of the new Terrace Cafeteria kitchen which also serves the Tea Room and it is not possible to allocate the costs of the various elements of the project meaningfully between the two areas.

WALES

Housing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the role of low-impact and self-built accommodation in the provision of affordable housing; and if he will make a statement. [3372]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I encourage energy efficiency in homes, the tackling of empty houses and the use of redundant buildings for housing. The Welsh Office encourages and supports local authorities to facilitate self-building of affordable homes, but this forms a small part of the total affordable home programme.

Wrexham Central Station

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the value of and *(b)* the number of grants to Trinity Investments and Railtrack to develop land surrounding Wrexham Central station; what tendering procedures have been followed; and for how long the grant is available. [4290]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Trinity Investments has been awarded, in principle, an urban investment grant not exceeding £3.5 million. The grant is subject to the conclusion of a legal agreement between the Welsh Development Agency and Trinity Investments.

Railtrack is not in receipt of grant.

Trinity Investments is responsible for the appointment of contractors to undertake the scheme. The tendering procedures do not involve the Department. Offer of grant is conditional upon a start on site by 31 March 1997. If the developer fails to start then, the project is subject to review.

Transport Policy

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to publish a strategic transport policy for Wales. [4292]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the oral answer given to the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) on 4 November, *Official Report*, column 896.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

EDS Ltd.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many contracts his Department, agencies and associated bodies have had with EDS for each year since 1985; what was the value of each contract; if he will indicate for each contract *(a)* if it was completed, *(b)* what modifications were made at the request of (i) the company and (ii) the Department and *(c)* if work under contract is being undertaken in-house; and if he will make a statement on the number of job reductions in his Department arising from the contracting out of work by EDS. [3816]

Mr. Hanley: We have placed 33 contracts with EDS since 1985, individual values as follows:

1. £8,114.00
2. £17,881.00
3. £604.00
4. £3,376.00
5. £80,760.00
6. £13,832.00
7. £4,682.00
8. £4,682.00
9. £82,746.00
10. £8,788.00
11. £72,950.00
12. £7,562.50
13. £11,950.00
14. £2,100.00
15. £8,200.00
16. £58,990.00
17. £16,784.00
18. £17,881.00
19. £1,254.00
20. £35,762.00
21. £11,000.00
22. £4,885.00
23. £4,500.00
24. £54,000.00
25. £4,720.00
26. £4,682.00
27. £9,265.00
28. £10,000.00
29. £1,900.00
30. £7,000.00

31. £7,500.00

32. £12,000.00

33. £2,100.00.

(a) All contracts were completed to the satisfaction of this Department.

(b) (i) and (ii) No significant modifications were made by either party.

(c) It has not been possible to identify whether any jobs were done in-house; and there have been no quantifiable job reductions arising from the above contracts.

Pakistan

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of the change of Government in Pakistan on relations with the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [3912]

Mr. Liam Fox: We have good relations with Pakistan, and look forward to them continuing under the current Government and in the future. We continue to follow developments in Pakistan closely.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when an application to reside in the United Kingdom was made by *(a)* Mrs. Benazir Bhutto and *(b)* her husband. [3986]

Dr. Fox: We treat in confidence all information given in connection with visa and immigration matters. It is our practice not to reveal whether such applications have been made, or any information about such applications.

LORD CHANCELLORS'S DEPARTMENT

Marriage and the Family (Support)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the scope and conditions of his proposed consultation regarding the strengthening and support of marriage and the family. [3543]

Mr. Streeter: The marriage task force, which was set up by the Lord Chancellor in April 1995, recently completed a consultation exercise on the most effective ways of supporting marriage. Forty eight marriage support agencies have now been invited to submit proposals for pilot projects under a programme to be funded by the Lord Chancellor's Department. The award of contracts under the programme will be announced early in 1997, and the projects are expected to start in April. The exact number and coverage of the projects will not be known until all the bids have been evaluated.

TREASURY

ECOFIN

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the recent Council meeting of the Economic and Finance Ministers of the European Union. [4625]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I represented the UK at the Economic and Finance Council—ECOFIN—of the European Union in Brussels on 11 November.

The Council considered a draft report to the Dublin European Council on reinforced convergence procedures and a new exchange rate mechanism in third stage of EMU.

The Council considered a report from the Commission on the stability pact for ensuring budgetary discipline in the third stage of EMU. This will be discussed again at the December Council.

The Council took note of progress in the working group which is preparing Community regulations to form the legal framework which will govern how the single currency will be introduced and used. This work will be considered again at the December Council.

The Council took note of Commissioner Monti's report on taxation in the European Union. It was agreed that a high-level tax policy group should continue to examine taxation issues.

Commissioner Liikanen presented the report of the high-level group which has been looking at sound and efficient management 2000—the Commission's programme of financial management reform. The report will be discussed again at the December Council.

The Council discussed further lending to Ukraine, including the disbursement of the second tranche of the 200 mecu loan agreed in 1995 with a view to its disbursement when the loan conditions have been met.

The Council also discussed the renewal of the European investment bank's lending mandates. The mandates are due to be agreed by the Council by the end of the year and will therefore be discussed again in December.

The Council considered convergence reports from the Commission and the European Monetary Institute, as required by article 109j of the Treaty on European Union, and agreed that a majority of member states did not satisfy the criteria and that the Community should therefore not move to the third stage of economic and monetary union in 1997. A final decision on the issue will be taken by the Council meeting as Heads of State and Government in December. This decision is a legal formality as the European Council at Florence has already ruled out a 1997 start date for the single currency.

Building Societies

Ms Lynne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rules govern the payment of bonuses by building societies converting to banks in respect of individuals who have two building society accounts in their names; and if he will review the rules to ensure that charitable organisations that hold building society accounts in the name of an individual who also has a personal account receive bonus payments made when a building society converts to a bank. [3517]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:* The Building Societies Act 1986 gives converting building societies considerable discretion in structuring their distribution schemes. A society could propose to

confer a benefit on each account held by an individual. The structure of distribution schemes is a matter for the societies concerned [illegible] for their members.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Non-taught School Activities

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to what extent areas intended to be used for communal non-taught school activities are taken into account when calculating the adequacy of classroom provision in relation to the number of pupils attending a school. [4056]

Mrs. Gillan: Decisions about the size of individual classrooms and other areas within schools are a matter for local education authorities and grant-maintained school governing bodies.

Hendon School

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils sought to enter Hendon school in September 1996; and what was the figure in September 1987. [3890]

Mr. Robin Squire: I understand that, in 1987, 146 applications were made for a place at Hendon school, and that this year the number was 462.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the change in the number of pupils seeking to attend GM schools since they attained GM status. [3946]

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not collected centrally.

Dyslexia

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to liaise with employers to enable those with dyslexia to obtain jobs; and if she will make a statement. [4202]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. J. L. Grover to Mr. Barry Jones, dated 15 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me, in the absence of the Chief Executive, to reply to you about proposals to liaise with employers to enable those with Dyslexia to obtain jobs.

As part of the Employment Service's national job broking role, specialist Placing, Advice and Counselling Teams (PACTs) already liaise with employers to encourage good practice in recruiting and employing people with disabilities, to promote better understanding of disabled people's potential in work, including those with dyslexia, and specifically to place disabled people in jobs.

The Employment Service's disability symbol initiative helps employers to implement good practices. PACTs' continuing work in influencing employers' practices, both to adopt the Disability Symbol and more widely, will support the new Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) the employment provisions of which come into effect on 2 December this year.

The specialist Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) who work within the PACTs are specifically trained so that they are able to provide assessment, tailored employment rehabilitation (including employer placements) and advice on aids and special equipment as well as directly finding employment opportunities for people with disabilities, including those with dyslexia. Additionally the ES also produces a booklet "Sources of Information and Advice". This gives employers information about organisations which can offer advice or services covering a variety of disabilities and includes the British Dyslexia Association and the Dyslexia Institute.

I hope this is helpful.

School Class Sizes

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 11 November, *Official Report*, column *76*, on school class sizes, what proportion of primary schools and secondary schools in 1979 had classes of more than 30 pupils. [4390]

Mr. Robin Squire: Fifty nine per cent. of primary schools and 74 per cent. of secondary schools had at least one class of more than 30 pupils taught by one teacher in January 1979.

Preston School, Stockton-on-Tees

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were *(a)* the initial assessments and *(b)* the consultations reached by the Department's inspection team which visited Preston school, Eaglescliffe, Stockton-on-Tees. [4481]

Mr. Robin Squire: Officials from the Department visited Preston school in September following an invitation from the head of the school. They did not inspect the school—that would be for the Office for Standards in Education. They were accompanied by officers from Stockton local education authority, who explained that the LEA intended to include improvement work at the school in a capital bid, to be made in the autumn of 1997 for the financial year 1998–99. That is a matter for the LEA.

Teacher Education

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) when she intends to publish the summary of the first draft report of the primary sweep inspection of teacher education departments; [4375]

(2) if she will list the head teachers who will be responsible for conducting the re-inspection of teacher education departments; and if she will publish their CVs. [4377]

Mr. Forth: These are matters for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she intends to publish her proposals for a national curriculum for teacher education. [4376]

Mr. Forth: In her announcement on 18 September, my right hon. Friend made it clear that the first stage of the national curriculum would be primary English and mathematics. The proposals on this will be published for consultation early in 1997.

Proposals on the curriculum for secondary English and mathematics, and primary and secondary science, will be published later.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received from the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals on the issue of the re-inspection of teacher education departments. [4389]

Mr. Forth: None. My right hon. Friend expects all providers of initial teacher training to give inspectors access; that is a condition of their public funding.

Teacher Training Agency

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people are employed in the Teacher Training Agency; and what is the total salary bill. [4378]

Mr. Forth: This is a matter for the Teacher Training Agency. I will ask the chairman of the agency, Mr. Geoffrey Parker, to write to the hon. Member direct.

TRANSPORT

Buses (Rotherham)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to encourage national bus companies to serve Rotherham. [3891]

Mr. Watts: The Government are working with bus operators and local authorities on a national basis to encourage the development of bus services and promote their use. However, the provision of services in Rotherham, as elsewhere, is primarily a matter for the commercial judgment of bus operators and for the local authority, which has power to subsidise socially necessary services which are not being provided commercially.

Office of Passenger Rail Franchising

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what redress is available to Opraf in the event of a rail franchise operator *(a)* failing to comply with the terms of the passenger service requirement for the franchise and *(b)* failing to complete the full time scale of the franchise. [4051]

Mr. Watts: The passenger service requirement—PSR—forms part of the franchise agreement. Franchisees are required, within their access agreements with Railtrack, to ensure that the services set out in the PSR are in the timetable. Failure to use all reasonable endeavours do so is an event of default. Franchisees may also commit either a breach of the franchise agreement or an event of default if they fail to meet thresholds for reliability set out in the agreement. In addition, some operators will be penalised under the incentive regime for delays or cancellations for commuter and regional services.

If there is a breach of the franchise agreement, the franchising director may serve an enforcement order requiring compliance. Failure to comply is an event of default. If an event of default occurs, the franchising director has the power to terminate a franchise and to call the performance bond. All franchisees are required to subscribe a percentage of the initial level of capital required by the franchising director to underwrite the franchise to fund a performance bond. The performance bond will be used to contribute to any additional costs or liabilities which the franchising director or a successor operator may incur due to, among other things, premature termination of the franchise.

Traffic Area Offices

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he proposes to close the traffic area offices in Manchester and Cardiff. [4116]

Mr. Bowis: We plan to complete the closure of the traffic area offices in Manchester and Cardiff by the end of the current financial year.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to lay a statutory instrument before the House to redefine traffic area office boundaries. [4117]

Mr. Bowis: I expect to make an announcement shortly.

EDS Ltd.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many contracts his Department, agencies and associated bodies have had with EDS for each year since 1985; what was the value of each contract; if he will indicate for each contract *(a)* if it was completed, *(b)* what modifications were made at the request of (i) the company and (ii) his Department and *(c)* if work under contract is being undertaken in-house; and if he will make a statement on the number of job reductions in his Department arising from the contracting out of work by EDS. [3805]

Mr. Bowis: The information requested is set out in the table. The value of each contract has not been revealed on the grounds that this information is commercially confidential.

Year	Number of contracts	Contract completed	Modifications made at the behest of EDS	Modifications made at the behest of the Department	Work under contract being undertaken in-house	Number of job reductions arising from contracting out work
1991	1	Yes	None	None	No	None
1993	1	No	None	None	No	None
1993	1	No	None	None[1]	Yes[2]	None[3]
1993	1	No	None	None	No	None
1993	1	No	None	None	Yes[4]	None
1994	1	Yes	None	None	No	None
1996	1	No	None	None	No	None

Information on contracts awarded before 1991 is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Notes:

[1] EDS has been asked to provide prices for the development of new systems to meet legislative requirements.

[2] Three EDS members of staff form part of a joint account management unit at DVLA.

[3] No job reductions, but 320 DOT staff working for DVOIT transferred to EDS on the sale of the organisation to that company.

[4] Ten EDS members of staff are engaged on a project for the provision of a new booking system at DSA.

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was his Department's expenditure on consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94. [3580]

Mr. Bowis: The information is as follows:

Press and Media

1993–94: £707,000

1994–95: £330,000

1995–96: £930,000.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery (Feasibility Studies)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many feasibility studies have been funded from the proceeds of the national lottery; at what cost; and how many have produced completed projects. [3988]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 14 November 1996]:* To date, the national lottery distributing bodies have made 168 awards for feasibility studies for a total of £15,313,311. Many of these are still being carried out, and some will have resulted in full applications which will need to be considered by the distributing bodies. My officials have asked the distributing bodies to confirm how many of these studies have produced completed projects and will write to the hon. Member with this information.

Sex and Violence

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what discussions she has had with television, satellite and cable companies regarding the introduction of a non-statutory system for publicly rating their television output for sex and violence; [3541]

(2) if she will make it her policy to encourage television, satellite and cable companies to introduce a system for publishing a rating for sex and violence with their television schedules. [3542]

Mr. Sproat: As part of its research into the V-chip, the Department has consulted broadcasters and other organisations, including those representing viewers, on the feasibility and desirability of a ratings system for television programmes. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State also expects to explore this and other ideas with the chairmen of the BBC, the Independent Television Commission and the Broadcasting Standards Council when she meets them next month to discuss public concern about violence on television.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Local Councillors (Benefits)

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what proposals he has to extend the UB40 exclusion of basic allowances to apply to income support for people who serve on local authorities; and if he will make a statement; [3181]

(2) what plans he has to update the benefits payable to people who are elected to local councils and are unemployed; [3182]

Mr. Roger Evans: We have no plans to change the rules that currently apply to local authority councillors who are receiving income support or jobseeker's allowance.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently receiving housing benefit in the United Kingdom; and what is the breakdown of these figures by region or local authority. [3803]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information relating to Great Britain has been placed in the Library.

I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for the Northern Ireland figures.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated cost to the Government of funding housing benefit in the current year; and if he will make a statement. [3804]

Mr. Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Planned cost to central government of housing benefit 1996–97

Expenditure type	*Amount £ million*
Rent allowances	5,135
Discretionary rent allowances	18
Non-HRA rent rebates	87
Rent rebates (England)	3,114
Rent rebates (Wales)	192
Rent rebates (Scotland)	531
Administration	186
Anti-fraud incentives	22
Challenge funding	8
Total	9,293

Sources:
1. Table 1 of the Social Security departmental report: the government's expenditure plans 1996–97 to 1998–99.
2. Local government finance report 1996–97 (Department of the Environment).
3. Spending working group paper: SSASG (96)97 (Department of the Environment).
4. Finance circular 8/1996 (Scottish Office).

Fishermen

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what entitlement fishermen from other member states have for *(a)* social security or *(b)* unemployment benefit while in the United Kingdom; and how many such claims have been dealt with in the last 12 months. [3657]

Mr. Roger Evans: Only fishermen from other member states who have paid United Kingdom national insurance contributions would have entitlement to United Kingdom contributory benefits, including contribution-based jobseeker's allowance.

Fishermen from other member states would qualify for income-related benefits available to unemployed people, including income-based jobseeker's allowance only if they were habitually resident in the United Kingdom.

We have no information on the number of claims made by fishermen from member states.

Benefits Agency (Emergency Services)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reasons the Benefits Agency out-of-office hours emergency telephone service in Bradford was closed before a national review of the service had been completed; what consultations took place before the Bradford emergency service closed; if he will restore the emergency service in Bradford; and if he will make a statement. [4133]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Max Madden, dated 14 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for what reasons the Benefits Agency out-of-hours emergency telephone service in Bradford closed down before a national review of the service had been completed; what consultations took place before the Bradford emergency closed; if he will restore the emergency service in Bradford; and if he will make a statement.

There has been no closure of the Out-of-Hours Service in the Bradford area. The service continues to operate from Monday to Sunday and for the four week period ended 3.11.96 there were 63 referrals.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what have been the costs incurred by his Department in publicising the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance, by region. [3919]

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on 14 November, *Official Report*, column *338*.

War Pensions

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many London boroughs *(a)* fully and *(b)* partially disregard war pensions when assessing housing benefit. [3889]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not collected centrally. Any decision concerning the enhancement of the mandatory disregards of a war disablement pension or war widow's pension is entirely for individual local authorities.

HEALTH

Human Blood and Blood Products

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the costs of *(a)* collecting, *(b)* testing, *(c)* processing and *(d)* storing human blood and human blood products; and what studies he has commissioned to establish the costs involved. [3422]

Mr. Horam: These are matters for the National Blood Authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman, Sir Colin Walker.

Prescribing Practices

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is issued to general practitioners by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* health authority pharmaceutical advisers in cases where branded medicine is available only by private prescription and a patient suffers adverse reactions to the generic alternatives.[3423]

Mr. Malone: No specific guidance is issued. Clinicians may prescribe any medication available on the national health service which is appropriate to meet patients' needs. Where products are not prescribable, alternatives are available to meet clinical needs. Any adverse reaction to a product would normally be expected in both a branded product and a generic equivalent.

GPs (Payments for Elderly Patients)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response he is making to the British Medical

Association's proposals that GPs should seek extra payments in respect of elderly patients in care homes. [3765]

Mr. Malone: The Department regularly meets the British Medical Association to discuss relevant matters including the remuneration system for general practitioners.

Hospitals (Leeds)

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the capital spending on hospitals in Leeds in each year since 1980. [3865]

Mr. Horam: Information available centrally on capital schemes with a value over £1 million shows that, since 1980, we have invested over £133 million to improve health facilities in Leeds. This figure does not include spending on smaller schemes or block capital spending.

Public Expenditure

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of gross domestic product public expenditure on health constitutes in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Germany, *(c)* France, *(d)* Spain, *(e)* Switzerland, *(f)* United States of America and *(g)* Japan. [3884]

Mr. Malone: National health service expenditure in the United Kingdom in 1995–96 was £41,292 million—forecast outturn—which is 5.8 per cent. of gross domestic product. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development publishes figures for health spending, but these are not on a fully comparable basis.

MRSA

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what requirement there is on NHS trusts to notify cases in their hospitals of methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus; and in how many hospitals cases have been reported in the last 10 years. [3922]

Mr. Horam: There is no requirement on national health service trusts to notify cases of methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus—MRSA. However, the public health laboratory service maintains aggregate data on MRSA as part of its national surveillance of communicable disease and infection.

Smoking-related Diseases

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the annual cost to the NHS of smoking-related diseases. [3933]

Mr. Horam: Treatment costs to the national health service are not available on a year-by-year basis. Based on 1990 figures, the Health Education Authority's report "The Smoking Epidemic—A Prescription for Change" estimated that the annual cost to the NHS of treating smoking-related diseases is £610 million.

Ambulance Services (Yorkshire)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to evaluate the comparative records of providers of ambulance services in North Yorkshire, Humberside and West Yorkshire. [4001]

Mr. Horam: The performance of all national health service trusts is monitored by the NHS executive.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to investigate allegations concerning the ambulance service in North Yorkshire made in the Channel 4 "Despatches" programme of 14 November a transcript of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement. [4159]

Mr. Horam: The national health service executive and North Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS trust will review the contents of this programme and consider any action as appropriate.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EDS Ltd.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many contracts his Department, agencies and associated bodies have had with EDS for each year since 1985; what was the value of each contract; if he will indicate for each contract *(a)* if it was completed, *(b)* what modifications were made at the request of (i) the company and (ii) the Department and *(c)* if work under contract is being undertaken in-house; and if he will make a statement on the number of job reductions in his Department arising from the contracting out of work by EDS. [3800]

Mr. John M. Taylor: According to central records, my Department has not placed any contracts with EDS since 1985, although orders for IT goods have been placed under the Government catalogue—GCAT—contract with CCTA let with EDS earlier this year.

Opencast Coal Mining

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the (i) size, (ii) tonnage and (iii) depth conditions of each licence issued by the Coal Authority for opencast mining in each of the last five years, giving in each case the location by Parliamentary constituency. [3929]

Mr. Page: A list of opencast sites and their location was provided in my answer to the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on 11 November 1996, *Official Report*, columns *16-17*. Specific licence data are a matter for the Coal Authority.

UKAEA (Loans)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what factors led him to terminate the loans to the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority under the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (Extinguishing of Liabilities) Order 1996. [4147]

Mr. Richard Page *[holding answer 14 November 1996]:* The loans in question were taken out from the national loans fund by the UK Atomic Energy Authority following the Atomic Energy Authority Act 1986, which enabled it to act as a trading fund, borrowing to finance

its commercial activities and servicing the loans out of commercial revenues. Following the successful privatisation of the commercial parts of the authority as AEA Technology plc on 26 September 1996, the remaining authority exists principally to manage nuclear decommissioning and radioactive wastes. My Department now provides most of its funding, and the authority does not have the independent commercial profits that would be needed to service the loans. No purpose would be served by our using public expenditure to enable the authority to service national loans fund loans. We therefore extinguished the loans, which we were able to do under the powers given last year by the Atomic Energy Authority Act 1995 because the sale proceeds from the privatisation of AEA Technology plc were larger than the total of the outstanding loans and commencing capital debt of the authority.

DEFENCE

Contaminated Land

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what environmental impact assessment has been conducted in respect of contaminated land at *(a)* RAF Lakenheath, *(b)* RAF Molesworth, *(c)* RAF Valley, *(d)* RAF Aberporth, *(e)* RAF Brawdy, *(f)* RAF St. Athan, *(g)* Llangennech and Brecon barracks and *(h)* RAF Caerwent. [3835]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 13 November, *Official Report*, column *219*.

Depleted Uranium Shells

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what facilities have been used for the construction of depleted uranium shells; and what environmental audit has been conducted at these facilities since 1979. [3924]

Mr. Soames: My Department possesses no facilities for the construction of depleted uranium ammunition. In 1982, my Department developed the royal ordnance speciality materials facility at Featherstone, near Wolverhampton, for the manufacture of depleted uranium components for 120mm main battle tank ammunition. The manufacture of Challenger 1 components was carried out there between 1985 and 1990. Former royal ordnance factories Birtley, County Durham, and Glascoed, Gwent, were involved in the assembly of those components into full rounds.

The speciality materials facility became part of Royal Ordnance plc in 1989. It is now owned by British Aerospace plc. Throughout its operational life, the facility has followed National Radiological Protection Board advice and fully complied with legislation on radiological site licensing, including environmental audit. Information on the environmental audit records for the speciality materials facility, RO(Birtley) and RO(Glascoed) is a matter for Royal Ordnance plc.

Radium Luminising

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's programme to clean up and restore sites where radium luminising has taken place, indicating the location of each site, the steps taken to decontaminate the site and the cost to date of restoration work. [3979]

Mr. Soames: Radium luminising took place during the 1940s and 1950s prior to the introduction of controls under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960. No record of facilities or sites specifically engaged in this work were therefore maintained, but where past practices involving the use of radium luminised materials have resulted in contamination of the site, this is addressed as part of the land quality assessment—LQA—process with decontamination being undertaken where necessary.

A prioritised LQA programme for the Defence estate is being prepared, with high priorities assigned to sites where there are plans for significant change of use, including sale, or where contamination is suspected. Where radium contamination is identified in an LQA, the need for clean-up and remediation will be determined, taking into account the future use of the site. This will be undertaken on a case-by-case basis.

The steps to decontaminate a site will depend on the circumstances, but in all cases such work is in accordance with relevant legislation. Contaminated arisings are disposed of in accordance with letters of agreement issued by the environmental agencies and their predecessors.

The cost restoration work could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

RAF Stafford

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what quantities of radioactive materials are currently stored at RAF Stafford; what plans have been developed for the disposal of this material; what are the estimated costs of the storage and disposal of the materials; and what environmental audit his Department has conducted of the site. [3984]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

RAF Carlisle

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to which sites the contaminated wastes removed from RAF Carlisle have been taken; in what way the wastes were packed and transported; what environmental assessment has been conducted of the disposal sites in regard to their long-term security; what has been the cost to date of the decontamination programme at RAF Carlisle; when he expects it to be completed; and at what final cost. [3920]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Special Air Service

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the shortfall at 1 November in the Special Air Service. [4068]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 18 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *735*.

Female Service Personnel

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many female service personnel were in the armed forces on 1 October 1991 and 1 October 1996. [4451]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Analytical Services Agency, DASA, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Paul Altobell to Dr. David Clark, dated 15 November 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your question to the Secretary of State for the Armed Forces about the number of female service personnel in the armed forces as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Analytical Services Agency.

The number of female service personnel in the armed forces on 1 October 1991 is 19,262.

The number of female service personnel in the armed forces on 1 October 1996 is 15,259. This figure does not include 494 females serving in the Royal Irish Regiment—in 1991 such personnel were members of the Ulster Defence Force for which no details are available.

This information is published monthly by Defence Analytical Services Agency in Tri-Service Personnel Statistics (TSP)1 and is available in the House of Commons library.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many female officers are currently in the armed forces. [4427]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Defence Analytical Services Agency—DASA—under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Paul Altobell to Dr. David Clark, dated 15 November 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your question to the Secretary of State for the Armed Forces about the number of female officers in the armed forces as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Analytical Services Agency.

The most recent return of armed forces personnel strength is at situation date 1 October 1996. The number of female officers in the armed forces at 1 October 1996 is 2,398. This figure does not include 17 female officers serving in the Royal Irish Regiment.

This information is published monthly by Defence Analytical Services Agency in Tri-Service Personnel Statistics (TSP)1 and is available in the House of Commons library.

Channel Islands (War-time Occupation)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 12 November, *Official Report*, column *113*, on records relating to the war-time occupation of the Channel Islands, if he will make a statement on the particular contents of the files to be made available at the Public Record Office; and what factors underlay the delay in their release. [4428]

Mr. Soames: The files to be released are already held by the Public Record Office and the information sought will be readily gleaned from an examination of the papers on their release next week. The files in question were originally closed under the provisions of the Public Record Act 1958 for reasons of personal sensitivity. That sensitivity having lapsed, the files are now being released under the open government initiative.

Tanks

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the techniques and equipment used by the armed services to transport tanks. [4426]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Defence Transport and Movements Executive—DTMX—under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Hodson to Dr. David Clark, dated 15 November 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence, about the transportation of tanks, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Transport and Movements Executive Agency.

Main Battle Tanks (MBTs) may be moved by three means: road, rail and sea, depending on the location and destination. Within the UK, transportation is by road, either on military owned and operated tank transporters or, when Service resources are fully tasked, by commercial heavy lift hauliers. Rail cannot be utilized due to the limitations of the UK 'loading gauge'.

On the continent, MBTs are moved by both road and rail. Military tank transporters are used within Germany but their axle weights exceed the limits for the Low Countries and there, commercial road hauliers or rail are employed. Train movement may comprise just individual tanks or an entire squadron of tanks and other armoured vehicles, and be on either military or commercial rolling stock.

MBTs move by sea to other parts of the world, e.g. Canada, where they are on-moved by rail. The vessels can be either Service or commercial, chartered from the international market. The preferred type is the Roll-on/Roll-off (Ro Ro), as this allows for quicker loading and discharge, compared to the Lift-on/Lift-off (Lo Lo) freighters.

Royal Navy

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how the role of the Royal Navy will be affected by withdrawal from Hong Kong. [4493]

Mr. Soames: The UK's wider interest in security in the region will not diminish when the sovereignty of Hong Kong is transferred to China next year. The Royal Navy will continue to deploy to the far east, as it has done traditionally. In addition to our continuing commitment to the five powers defence agreement—FPDA—we will continue our programme of bilateral defence contacts with our friends in the region.

Reserve Forces Call-out

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons those members of the reserve forces whose main qualifications are in transporting nuclear weapons have been sent letters asking them to volunteer to be considered for call-out for service in the former Republic of Yugoslavia. [4291]

Mr. Soames: Volunteers from the reserve forces, in particular the Territorial Army, continue to make a significant contribution in support of British operations in the former Yugoslavia. In line with this, volunteers are being sought to fill eight posts in December this year for which the driver qualification C + E—heavy goods

vehicles—is required. Letters have therefore been sent to some 50 members of the Regular Reserve who hold this qualification. There is no specific qualification within the British Army relating to the transport of nuclear weapons, and none of those to whom letters have been sent were selected on the basis of previous experience in this field.

Armed Forces (Deaths)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces have died in each of the last five years. [4422]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Defence Analytical Services Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Paul Altobell to Dr. David Clark, dated 15 November 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of service personnel who have died since 1991 as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of Defence Analytical Services Agency.

The number of tri-service deaths (including Gurkhas) reported to DASA as at 13 November 1996 is as follows:

Year	*Army*	*Navy*	*RAF*
1991	192	53	65
1992	155	48	64
1993	133	44	64
1994	130	37	52
1995	114	31	62
1996[1]	69	20	32
Total	773	233	339

[1] Reported up to 13 November 1996.

Army Recruitment

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the current year's recruitment targets for each Army regiment. [4423]

Mr. Soames: Recruiting targets are set not by regiment, but by arm and service. In the case of the infantry, soldier targets are set by divisions of infantry. The targets for 1996–97 are shown in the table:

Arm/service	*Officers*	*Soldiers*	*Apprentices*
H Cav/RAC	69	800	—
RA	88	1,400	—
RE	62	960	234
R Signals	49	1,040	200
Infantry	234	—	—
Household Division	—	800	—
Scottish Division	—	800	—
Queen's Division	—	800	—
King's Division	—	800	—
Prince of Wales Division	—	1,020	—
Light Division	—	580	—
Royal Irish (GS)	—	140	—
Parachute Regiment	—	460	—
AAC	—	24	160
RAChD	—	10	0
RLC	82	2,400	186
RAMC	54	200	—
REME	36	640	450
AGC	53	760	—
RAVC	2	32	—
SASC	[1]0	0	—
RADC	10	40	—
INT CORPS	9	100	—
APTC	[1]0	0	—
QARANC	20	120	—
CA Mus	[1]0	120	—
Total	802	[2]14,172	[2]1,070

[1] Officer entry only through late entry commission and SNCO/WO commissioned on transfer from other arms and services.
[2] Soldiers and apprentices combined = 15,242.

Training Areas

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the training areas available for use by British forces in the world. [4425]

Mr. Soames: I shall write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

ENVIRONMENT

House Building (South-East)

Mr. Renton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to revise the predict and provide assumption for house building in the south-east of England. [3096]

Mr. Clappison: One of the objectives of the town and country planning system is to provide houses in a way which is consistent with sustainable development. In planning for future housing, and where it should go, planning authorities need to look 10 to 15 years ahead. Projections of future household formation are just one of the factors that need to be considered by the regional planning conferences when advising the Secretary of State on future housing requirements to be included in regional planning guidance. These figures are subsequently tested in development plans. The process, therefore, is not one of predict and provide.

Restricting the amount of additional housing to reduce consumption would make housing more expensive and mean that those on medium and low incomes were less able to afford a satisfactory quality of housing. There is little evidence that the availability of housing leads people to set up new households: social factors appear to be stronger.

The Government recognise that development pressures have been most intense in the south-east. The need to steer growth towards previously developed land and areas in need of economic regeneration, and to take advantage of the increasing European orientation of the regional economy, has led the Government to produce sub-regional planning guidance in the form of the Thames gateway planning framework. The Government are also committed to the target set in the housing White Paper—that, by 2005, half of all new homes will be built on reused sites.

The Government are also looking at policies which could reduce the impact or pattern of household formation on the current planning policies for housing and will shortly be publishing a Green Paper to take this discussion forward.

Household and Household Structure Projections

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research he has commissioned into the reliability of future household and household structure projections, with particular reference to changes in external immigration assumptions. [3065]

Mr. Clappison: The most recent household projections have been subject to considerable public scrutiny since their publication in March 1995, in particular by the Environment Committee in evidence for its report on housing need. While generally endorsing the projections, the Committee recommended that the Department continue to examine the extent to which household formation is affected by economic and social factors. This is currently being addressed in a research project with the department of applied economics, Cambridge university, the results of which should be available early in the new year.

One of the assumptions underlying the household projections concerns the future pattern of migration between England and the rest of the world. In recent years, international migration has departed from established patterns and become increasingly variable from year to year. Against this background, in 1992 the Government Actuary's Department, in collaboration with other Departments, undertook a thorough review of the methods used to set international migration assumptions. This led to a new methodology which was used for the first time in the preparation of the 1991-based national population projections. As with previous projections, the assumed level of migration over the projection period takes into account information from a run of previous years in order to even out the fluctuations from year to year. The robustness of sources of information on migration is kept under regular review by the Office for National Statistics.

Packaging Waste

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what plans he has to meet representatives of the National Federation of Retail Newsagents to discuss the directive on producer responsibility for packaging waste; and if he will make a statement; [3666]

(2) what steps he is taking to mitigate the impact of the directive on producer responsibility on packaging waste on small businesses with particular reference to newsagents; and if he will make a statement. [3665]

Mr. Clappison: We published in July a consultation document and draft regulations which would require businesses in the packaging chain to contribute on a shared basis to the recycling and recovery targets for waste packaging set by the EC directive on packaging and packaging waste. Among other issues, we sought views on the proposed treatment of small businesses that might be affected on such matters as the size of threshold proposed and whether it should be expressed in terms of turnover as well as, or in place of, packaging handled and an alternative means of assisting recycling and recovery. The National Federation of Retail Newsagents was one of over 100 trade associations and industry bodies to give us its views. I understand that the federation has also met my officials. We shall take the views of all those concerned into account in considering the final form of regulations.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when he proposes to report on the packaging waste regulations; and if he will make a statement; [3658]

(2) what replies he has received to the consultation document published by his Department on waste packaging; and if he will make a statement; [3660]

(3) if he will make a statement on the packaging materials currently used by United Kingdom industry; and if he will indicate the percentage of each which require to be recycled to achieve his targets. [3661]

Mr. Clappison: My Department proposes to bring forward the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations for the House to consider in the very near future. On 11 July, we issued for consultation draft proposals to be contained in the regulations; 6,000 copies were circulated, initially to an established list of consultees consisting of businesses, trade bodies, local authorities, consumer groups and individuals. A further 5,000 copies were distributed on request and leaflets summarising the proposal were sent to over 50,000 businesses, together with 8,000 computer discs to illustrate the principles involved. More than 40 events were held with industry and trade bodies to explain the proposals and the role of collective business schemes such as VALPAK. My Department has received 448 responses, of which 100 were from trade bodies from the materials and other sectors most closely concerned, which together represent over 53,000 member businesses.

The principal packaging materials currently used UK industries are glass, paper/board, plastics, aluminium and steel. The United Kingdom is required, by 2001 to have recycled a minimum of 15 per cent. by weight of each material and to recover 50 per cent. of all packaging waste. In practice, most of this is likely to be by materials recycling.

Natural Environment Research Council

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Natural Environment Research Council's terrestrial initiative in global environmental research—TIGER—programme; and what plans he has to commit new resources to the initiative. [4126]

Mr. Clappison: The terrestrial initiative in global environmental research—TIGER—is funded by the Natural Environment Research Council. It is, therefore, for the council to assess the effectiveness of its own programme, and to consider the case for supporting further work in the same field.

Local Government Boundaries

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue a reworked index of local conditions to cover authorities which have had major boundary changes. [4052]

Mr. Clappison: The Department intends to let a contract in December of this year which will include adjusting the index of local conditions to reflect all major local authority boundary changes. The work will also involve updating the non-census-based indicators where more up-to-date statistical information is available. The results of this work will be available in the Summer 1997.

Capital Challenge

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the local authority associations concerning capital challenge; and if he will make a statement. [3087]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration met the leaders of the local authority associations on 18 March to discuss their response to the Government's proposals for a pilot scheme. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State holds regular meetings with the local authority association chairmen, at which progress with the capital challenge pilot has been raised.

North Sea Conference

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he has made in ensuring that *(a)* fisheries conservation and *(b)* industrial fishing in particular is put on the agenda of the intermediate ministerial meeting of the North sea conference. [4102]

Mr. Clappison: The North sea intermediate ministerial meeting is to consider all aspects of fisheries and the environment. The UK delegation to the preparatory meetings has made it clear that both fisheries conservation and industrial fisheries should be specifically considered.

Public Income and Expenditure (London)

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to publish the consultation paper on public income and expenditure in London. [4998]

Mr. Gummer: I have today placed a copy of this consultation paper entitled "Public Finances in London—Methods and Estimates" in the Library of the House. Copies have been sent to a number of London organisations for comment.

SCOTLAND

Knives (Assaults)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many assaults with knives there were in Scotland in the last five years. [3384]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the total number of assaults with knives in that period is not available. The combined number of recorded victims of homicide and in-patient discharges from Scottish hospitals as a result of assaults with a knife or pointed article in the five years from and including 1991 was 6,664. The table gives a breakdown of this figure.

	In-patient discharges from Scottish hospitals with a diagnosis of injury (excluding death) resulting from an assault by a cutting or piercing instrument	*Number of victims of homicide recorded by the police in Scotland in which a knife or sharp instrument was used*	*Total*
1991	1,208	34	1,242
1992	1,486	70	1,556
1993	988	44	1,032
1994	1,191	58	1,249
1995	1,526	59	1,585
Total	6,399	265	6,664

EDS Ltd.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many contracts his Department, agencies and associated bodies have had with EDS for each year since 1985; what was the value of each contract; if he will indicate for each contract *(a)* if it was completed, *(b)* what modifications were made at the request of (i) the company and (ii) the Department and *(c)* if work under contract is being undertaken in-house; and if he will make a statement on the number of job reductions in his Department arising from the contracting out of work by EDS. [3818]

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: The Scottish Office has had no contracts with EDS since 1985.

Argyll and the Islands Enterprise

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the total number of *(a)* grants and *(b)* loans paid to Mondial Business Information Systems and Channel 11 Ltd. by Argyll and the Islands Enterprise; and when these sums were paid; [4176]

(2) what conditions were attached to the *(a)* grants and *(b)* loans paid to Mondial Business Information Systems and Channel 11 Ltd. by Argyll and the Islands Enterprise; [4175]

(3) what measures were undertaken by Argyll and the Islands Enterprise to assess the suitability of Mondial Business Information Systems and Channel 11 Ltd. to receive public money; and if he will make a statement. [4178]

Mr. Kynoch: Argyll and the Islands Enterprise operates under contract with Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I shall ask the chairman of the latter organisation to write to the hon. Member.

Enterprise Companies

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what standard guidelines are in place for Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the local enterprise companies regarding the assessment of *(a)* the suitability of companies for public investment and *(b)* the safeguards which should be taken when investing in ventures considered high risk. [4177]

Mr. Kynoch: Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and its network of local enterprise companies, are required to operate in accordance with a management statement and a manual of project and programme rules which offer guidance on the financial, strategic and operational framework within which the organisations operate. The importance of appraisal, including—where the success of a case or project depends upon the commercial viability of an enterprise—the need to undertake a separate financial appraisal of that enterprise and its prospects, as well as the need for an assessment of the risks and uncertainty associated with particular cases or projects, is emphasised in various parts of these documents.

Scottish Enterprise and its network of local enterprise companies operate under a similar regime.

Sandeels

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the answer of 7 November, *Official Report*, column *661*, when he expects the research project into industrial sandeel fisheries to report. [4160]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The international research project to study the impact of industrial sandeel fisheries on predator species off the east coast of Scotland is expected to take three years. A report to the European Commission is likely to be made in the latter half of 1999.

BSE

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the desirability of providing financial aid and incentives to encourage rural local authorities to set up specific local exchange trading schemes to help farmers during the BSE crisis; and if he will make a statement. [2311]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* We have received no representations to set up local exchange trading schemes. We would expect rural local authorities to take the initiative themselves if they considered there was a need in their areas.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Rabies

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made of the potential rabies threat to the United Kingdom arising from changes in the regulations to control rabies in France. [3448]

Mrs. Browning: New regulations in France provide for a programme of oral vaccination of foxes which, in practice, has been operational for the past seven years. The number of French départments deemed infested with rabies has fallen from 36 in 1991 to 22 in 1996. The Government note however that rabies is still present in France and believes that measures to keep the UK rabies-free remain essential.

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will assess the implications for United Kingdom rabies control policy of trends in the import of domestic dogs and cats into Sweden since 1994. [3449]

Mrs. Browning: We will be taking account of the trends in the import of domestic dogs and cats into Sweden since 1994 as part of the review of rabies policy, announced in my reply of 5 November 1996 to the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), *Official Report*, column *488*.

Animal Feed (Bees)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the percentage of *(a)* bovine feeding stuff and *(b)* pet food which is made up of bees; and if he will make a statement. [3506]

Mrs. Browning: I am not aware that any bovine feeding stuff or pet food incorporates bees as an ingredient.

Cattle Slaughter Scheme

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under what provisions he ordered abattoirs to take 75 per cent. of cull cows and 50 per cent. of clean cattle from livestock markets. [4254]

Mr. Baldry: This measure was brought in to help ensure the smooth running of the over-30-month scheme by improving access for producers and preserving historic patterns of trade. It is provided for by article 3 of EC regulation 716/96, which requires the United Kingdom to adopt all necessary measures to ensure proper application of the scheme.

Scrapie

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of scrapie were notified to Ministry officials *(a)* during 1995 and *(b)* between January and October 1995 under the terms of Specific Diseases (Notification and Slaughter) Order 1992. [4253]

Mrs. Browning: In 1995, 163 cases of scrapie were notified in Great Britain. Of these, 151 were confirmed as positive during the months January to October inclusive.

Dietary Supplements

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the subject of dietary supplements was last considered by the Codex Alimentarius Committee; and what policy was pursued by the British Government representatives in relation to dietary supplements at these meetings. [3101]

Mrs. Browning: The subject of dietary supplements was last considered by codex at the beginning of October this year, when further consideration was given to proposed guidelines for dietary supplements containing vitamins and minerals. The UK delegation at the meeting sought to ensure that draft guidelines reflected the approach currently taken in the UK.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 18 November 1996

HOME DEPARTMENT

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what funding has been made available under section 11 in each year since 1995; what funding provision has been made for *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; how many section 11 teachers are currently employed; and what estimate he has made of the number of section 11 teachers who will be employed in 1997–98; [4077]

(2) what representations his Department has received regarding *(a)* delays in announcing the future of section 11 funding, *(b)* reductions in section 11 teachers and *(c)* the role of section 11 for raising achievement levels among pupils with English as a second language.[4076]

Mr. Kirkhope: Not all the information requested is available.

In 1995–96, Home Office expenditure—not including projects transferred to the single regeneration budget—under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 was £54 million. Current provision for 1996–97 is £58 million. The number of approved posts specifically designated as to be filled by qualified teachers is currently 3,750 in full-time equivalent terms.

In recent months, we have received a substantial number of representations, in writing or by telephone, which sought information about the funding position from next April onwards, and urged that there should be no reduction in current levels of funding.

On 13 November, *Official Report*, column *242*, I announced that, despite other pressures on public expenditure, the current overall level of funding would be maintained until 31 August 1998. This will include projects originally approved under section 11 but at present funded under the single regeneration budget. Subject to a very small number of changes related to current projects for which alternative funding has already been secured, or which were not intended to be funded beyond next March, we would expect the number of approved posts to remain much the same.

Television Licences

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been imprisoned in 1996 to date for defaulting on a fine arising from their non-payment of television licences; what was the figure for the same period in 1995; and what assessment he has made of the use of imprisonment in respect of television licence fee evaders. [2743]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Dafydd Wigley, dated 18 November 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking, how many people have been imprisoned in 1996 to date for defaulting on a fine arising from their non-payment of television licences; for the figure for the same period in 1995; and for an assessment of the use of imprisonment in respect of television licence fee evaders.

Provisional information for the period January to September 1996 shows that 262 people were received into prison for defaulting on a fine after conviction for using a television without a licence. This is against 599 received during the same period in 1995, indicating a significant drop in the use of imprisonment.

Juvenile Criminal Justice System

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the juvenile criminal justice system. [2873]

Mr. Maclean: The Government have introduced a number of measures to improve the juvenile criminal justice system. These include strengthening the courts' powers for dealing with young offenders by increasing maximum sentence for youth custody for 15 to 17-year-olds, by introducing long periods of detention for 10 to 13-year-olds for serious offences and providing a new sentence for persistent 12 to 14-year-old offenders.

New standards have been introduced for the supervision of young offenders in the community, as well as new criteria for cautioning. Amendments to the Crime (Sentences) Bill will pave the way for extending electronic monitoring of curfew orders to 10 to 15-year-olds, and giving youth courts the discretion to allow identification of juveniles convicted of an offence.

In addition, the Government will be publishing shortly a Green Paper on preventing young people most at risk of offending from becoming involved in crime.

Passport Checks

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department from which countries passengers arriving in the United Kingdom are asked for their passports in the walkway immediately upon leaving the aircraft. [4769]

Mr. Kirkhope: Passengers from any country may be subject to checks by immigration officers stationed at the exit from the aircraft.

Gambling Legislation

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which London borough councils in the docklands area he consulted before issuing his proposals published on 12 November for modifications of gambling legislation in selected areas in England and Wales; and what additional statutory provisions relating to defining the selected areas and specifying the regulations applying to them he plans when implementing these proposals. [4703]

Mr. Kirkhope: Our first consultation paper on casinos, published in February 1996, did not propose casino permitted area status for docklands.

We subsequently added them to the proposed list in our second consultation paper in the light of representations from the London borough of Tower Hamlets and other local interests.

We have sought views on our fresh proposals from relevant local authorities including the London boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Newham, and have sent a copy to Southwark.

We will reach final decisions on the choice of new permitted areas and the statutory provisions after the consultation period finishes on 31 January.

ENVIRONMENT

EDS Ltd.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many contracts his Department, agencies and associated bodies have had with EDS for each year since 1985; what was the value of each contract; if he will indicate for each contract *(a)* if it was completed, *(b)* what modifications were made at the request of (i) the company and (ii) the Department and *(c)* if work under contract is being undertaken in-house; and if he will make a statement on the number of job reductions in his Department arising from the contracting out of work by EDS. [3797]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department currently has no contracts with EDS. Information on contracts completed prior to 1995 together with full information on the Department's agencies and associated bodies is obtainable only at disproportionate cost.

The following contracts were completed in 1995:

Year of inception	*Contract value* £	*Modifications*
1992	358,000	Three—one at the company's request and two at DOE's request
1995	30,000	None
1995	6,000	None

No job reductions resulted as the contracts did not cover in-house tasks that were being outsourced.

Marine Environmental Pollution

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the European Community directives relating to the requirement to carry out *(a)* environmental impact assessments and *(b)* environmental audits, applying to areas of the seabed between member states of the European Union in circumstances where states assess environmental contamination may have arisen in a specific location. [3834]

Sir Paul Beresford: There are no EC directives requiring either environmental impact assessment or environmental audit for the seabed between member states in the specific circumstances where member states assess that environmental contamination of that seabed may have occurred.

European Union (Labour Conditions)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the European Union member countries by order of *(a)* fatality rate of workers and *(b)* maximum working hours. [4110]

Sir Paul Beresford: The latest available information is given in the following tables:

(a) Fatality rates per 100,000 employees/self-employed

Country	*Year*	*Fatality rate*
Netherlands	1991	0.80
Great Britain	1993	1.20
Finland	1993	2.00
Denmark	1992	2.50
Germany[1]	1992	3.00
Greece	1992	3.30
Belgium	1992	3.60
France[1]	1993	3.90
Ireland	1992	4.00
Spain[1]	1993	4.90
Italy[1]	1991	5.70
Portugal	1992	5.70

Sources:

HSE Study[1] and Statistical Office of the European Commission.

(b) Statutory maximum hours

Country	*Statutory maximum hours*
UK	None
Denmark	None
France	39.00
Austria	40.00
Belgium	40.00
Finland	40.00
Greece	40.00
Luxembourg	40.00
Spain	40.00
Sweden	40.00
Portugal	44.00
Germany	48.00
Ireland	48.00
Italy	48.00
Netherlands	48.00

Source:

Employment Observatory Tableau de Bord 1995, European Commission.

Planning Appeals

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average current period taken for the consideration of planning appeals; and what assessment he has made of the manpower levels of the Planning Inspectorate. [4119]

Sir Paul Beresford: Responsibility for the provision of information on performance on the processing of planning appeals has been delegated to the Planning Inspectorate under its chief executive Mr. Chris Shepley. The agency is therefore responding to the question.

Letter from J. Greenfield to Sir Dudley Smith, dated 15 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for the Environment has asked me to reply to your Question about the time taken to process planning appeals and the assessment of manpower levels in the Inspectorate.

Inspectors determine planning appeals by one of three procedures: written representations; hearing; and public inquiry. The time in weeks to determine 80 per cent of appeals by each procedure for the period 1 April to 30 September 1996 is shown in the table below:

Procedure	*Time to determine 80 per cent. of appeals (weeks)*
Written representations	25
Hearing	46
Public inquiry	56

The agency has been set the target of achieving a significant improvement in performance handling planning appeals over the three years ending in March 1999. To achieve the level of performance required and keep abreast of the agency's other work, 33 inspectors were recruited in 1995 and a further 31 this year.

Freedom of the Cities and Trust Councils Initiatives

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the documents published by his Department relating to the *(a)* freedom of the cities and *(b)* trust councils initiatives. [4121]

Sir Paul Beresford: There are no such documents.

Health and Safety

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many official speeches he has made specifically on health and safety since his Department took over responsibilities of the Health and Safety Executive. [4122]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend is responsible for a very wide range of subjects. He has addressed the launch of the Health and Safety Commission's noise at work campaign and a conference on inspection for health. As Minister with particular responsibility for health and safety at work, I have made a number of speeches on this subject and will continue to do so.

Opencast Mining

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has made in respect of tighter environmental rules for opencasting to the European Commission; and if he will make a statement. [3915]

Sir Paul Beresford: None.

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 12 November, *Official Report*, column *104*, on the Building Research Establishment, if he will list the criteria which were specified in April for the future operation of the Building Research Establishment. [4519]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend's 2 April statement did not specify criteria as such, but it made clear that BRE should remain a single entity in the private sector. This was because BRE offers a unique range of complementary skills and technologies, and fragmentation would both substantially increase costs to customers and reduce efficiency.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the bidders for the Building Research Establishment. [4570]

Mr. Jones: The competitive sale of BRE is being conducted on a two-stage basis. We shall first be considering indicative bids from parties who have pre-qualified as potential purchasers, and subsequently final bids from a short list of these. We shall be treating information about bids and bidders as commercially confidential until a preferred purchaser is identified early in 1997.

Construction Skills Certification

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 12 November, *Official Report*, column *103*, on construction skills certification, what plans he has to encourage the registration of building operatives under the construction skills certificate scheme. [4520]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke at the launch of the scheme and we continue actively to support it.

Hedgerows

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy not to seek to destroy or weaken the protection recently afforded to enclosure and hedgerows by the courts. [4104]

Mr. Clappison: The Government published draft regulations for the protection of important hedgerows on 21 October 1996. As I explained in the answer that I gave to the hon. Member on 15 October 1996, *Official Report*, column *844*, these regulations will not override restrictions imposed by other enactments or agreements, including enclosure awards. I understand that a judgment is still awaited in respect of the protection afforded to enclosure hedgerows in the case referred to.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

EDS Ltd.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Attorney-General how many contracts his Department, agencies and associated bodies have had with EDS for each year since 1985; what was the value of each contract; if he will indicate for each contract *(a)* if it was completed, *(b)* what modifications were made at the request of (i) the company and (ii) the Department and *(c)* if work under contract is being undertaken in-house; and if he will make a statement on the number of job reductions in his Department arising from the contracting out of work by EDS. [3817]

The Attorney-General: The Departments and agencies for which I am responsible have not entered into any contracts with Electronic Data Systems Ltd.

TREASURY

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what regulations his Department proposes to repeal by the end of 1996; if he proposes to conduct a compliance cost assessment on each regulation repealed; and what is the estimated cost of undertaking a compliance cost assessment to determine the advantages and disadvantages of each repeal; [1393]

(2) if he will list the rules and regulations he proposes to repeal or amend by means of a reference to the Deregulation Committee before the end of 1996; and if he will make a statement. [2913]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 4 November 1996]:* The Treasury has consulted on the following proposals for use of the deregulation order-making power. The timing of any reference to the Deregulation Committee will depend on various factors, including the outcome of consultation.

Industrial Assurance Acts 1923 and 1948

Trustee Investments Act 1961.

In addition, the Chancellor's departments have completed consultation on the following measures, which are now subject to consideration by the Deregulation Committees of both Houses:

Treasury

Deregulation (Bills of Exchange) Order

Office for National Statistics

Deregulation (Validity of Civil Preliminaries to Marriage) Order.

Since the effect in each of the above cases will be to reduce, rather than increase, compliance costs, a compliance cost assessment will not be required. Departments do, however, seek to estimate approximate savings wherever possible. The cost of undertaking a CCA varies from case to case, but is generally modest. Because part of the cost falls on the businesses consulted, a full CCA would be inappropriate for measures designed to reduce business burdens.

Sterling

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what has been the change in the value of the pound sterling against *(a)* the deutschmark, *(b)* the French franc, *(c)* the ecu and *(d)* the US dollar since January 1996; and if he will make a statement on the impact on the economy of fluctuations in *(a)* to *(d)*; [3985]

(2) what measures he is taking to ensure a stable external value for sterling for export purposes. [3905]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Between 1 January 1996 and 12 November 1996, sterling has risen by *(a)* 11 per cent. against the deutschmark, *(b)* 9 per cent. against the French franc, *(c)* 6 per cent. against the ecu and *(d)* 6 per cent. against the US dollar. The Government recognise the value of a stable exchange rate but do not have a target for sterling. The exchange rate is only one of many factors which must be taken into account in setting policy.

Partnership and Closed Company Registrations

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* partnerships and *(b)* closed companies are registered with the Inland Revenue for tax purposes. [3904]

Mr. Jack: At the latest count, the Inland Revenue was dealing with approximately 650,000 partnerships, and an estimate of around 800,000 non-dormant close companies.

PRIME MINISTER

European Summit

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received in relation to the location of the summit meeting during the next United Kingdom presidency of the Council of Ministers of the European Union. [4129]

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Prime Minister when he estimates Her Majesty's Government will decide its preferred venue for the 1998 European Union summit. [4070]

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has expressed support for Cardiff as a possible location for the June 1998 European Council. I am also aware of early-day motion 173 which also proposes Cardiff. An announcement will be made in due course.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a copy of his response to the letter from Friendship across Frontiers, signed by the chairman, Riad El Taher, on 6 November, about the mortality rate of Iraqi children, and the UNICEF report. [4391]

The Prime Minister: So far as I am aware, my office has not yet received this letter.

Tigris and Euphrates Valleys

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what response Her Majesty's Government have given to the Secretary General of the Arab League's representations about the humanitarian situation in the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates. [4465]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 15 November 1996]:* My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, discussed the humanitarian situation in Iraq during the Secretary General's visit to London in May 1996, and in Cairo in June 1996, raising in particular Saddam Hussein's indifference to the suffering of the Iraqi people. Saddam Hussein continues to delay implementation of UN Security Council resolution 986 by attempting to renegotiate issues already with the UN. Like the Arab League, we want SCR 986 implemented as soon as possible; it will bring much needed relief to millions of Iraqis.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Child Protection (Wars)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to protect children in wars where the United Kingdom has an aid interest. [4263]

Dr. Liam Fox: The Government have provided considerable humanitarian aid in a careful and targeted way in many war situations overseas. Support for children's needs is a high priority in all cases, delivered through agencies like the Red Cross, UNICEF and specialists such as the Save the Children Fund and Children's Aid Direct. Projects have benefited health, nutrition, orphan care, education, deprived families and family reunification.

Sudan

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the current need of the population of Sudan for international provision of basic foodstuffs for survival listed by area and broken down to show *(a)* Government-held *(b)* non-Government-held areas, and indicating if the delivery of such aid should be (i) via Khartoum, (ii) via east Africa or (iii) otherwise. [4659]

Dr. Liam Fox: In northern Sudan, serious food shortages have been reported this year in Darfur and Kordofan. The UK has provided £1.5 million to the Save the Children Fund and CARE UK for food aid, purchased within Sudan, to address needs in those areas. There are also reports of food shortages in Red Sea state. In southern Sudan, the World Food Programme predicts serious deficits over the next few months in Juba, Gogrial and parts of Jonglei state including Pochalla and Pibor.

The World Food Programme report that food for outstanding deficit areas in Government and non-Government held areas may be available for purchase within Sudan. They have not yet established the requirement for external provision of food aid. Precise delivery arrangements will depend on the source of food aid and the relative costs of delivery options.

DEFENCE

Surplus Ammunition

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what programme his Department has established to incinerate surplus ammunition; what sites are used; what environmental impact assessments have been conducted at each site; and what is the annual cost of the programme. [3926]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Michael Meacher, dated 18 November 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your question about the Ministry of Defence's programme to incinerate surplus ammunition. I am replying since the Ministry of Defence's programme is currently carried out by the Defence Evaluation & Research Agency (DERA) of which I am Chief Executive.

DERA has developed a programme for disposing of surplus ammunition and explosives by incineration based at its site at Shoeburyness in Essex. This was in response to ratification of the 1989 Oslo Convention, which banned the dumping of surplus ammunition and explosives at sea, and also a result of a general desire to find a more environmentally friendly means of disposing of these materials.

The Shoeburyness facility currently consists of two incinerators which have been developed over the past few years at a cost of about £5m. They employ a state of the art pollution control system which uses dry spun ceramic filtration and dry scrubbing to control gaseous emissions. All of the waste metals and most of the plastics generated by the system are recovered and recycled. Non recyclable solids are disposed of as controlled waste into a licensed land fill site. The plant does not discharge any waste into water. The system has been licensed by the Environment Agency and they undertake regular surveys to monitor its operation. DERA has also introduced its own programme of regular environmental monitoring of the site.

When fully operationally we anticipate that the incinerator system will be able to deal with up to 2000 tonnes of explosives and ammunition a year. Running costs are expected to be of the order of £600,000 a year. The system, which is known as Avocet, represents a considerable technical achievement and DERA is actively marketing it overseas with the aim of obtaining a return for the UK for our investment in this technology.

Military Hospital Closures

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the military hospitals which have closed in the last 12 months; and what proportion of their work was carried out for the NHS. [3054]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Defence Secondary Care Agency and I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Smith to Mr. Chris Smith, dated 18 November 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence on the closure of service hospitals as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Secondary Care Agency (DSCA) .

The DSCA was launched on 30 April this year. Since November 1995, the following three hospitals have closed:

The Princess Mary's Hospital, Halton;

The Princess Alexandra's, Royal Air Force Hospital, Wroughton;

The Cambridge Military Hospital, Aldershot.

The decision to close these hospitals arose from a combination of Options for Change and Front Line First recommendations. No Service hospitals have closed since the launch of this Agency.

Although the responsibility for the treatment of civilian patients rests with the Department of Health, NHS patients have been, and continue to be treated at Service hospitals. This enables our medical personnel to undertake the varied mixture of cases which they require for training and professional development for front lines roles. The proportion of NHS patients seen at the closed hospitals varied from year to year and depended on the location of the hospital. However, in general NHS patients accounted for between 50% and 70% of the hospitals' total caseload.

Tornado Aircraft

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions an overheated or failed cross-drive clutch has caused a fire in the rear fuselage of a Tornado aircraft. [2828]

Mr. Soames: In 16 years of Tornado operations there have been five confirmed cases of overheated or failed cross-drive clutches causing fires in the rear fuselages of RAF Tornado aircraft. These incidents all took place on the ground during routine engine running tests. The procedures for running Tornado engines on the ground have been reviewed and suitably amended.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Tornado GR1 and F3 aircraft will be allowed to fly before modification 1670 has been made in respect of the recirculating cross-over valve. [2829]

Mr. Soames: Yes. When modification 1670 was designed, a safety analysis confirmed that the operation of both F3 and GR1 Tornado at pre-modification 1670 standard was safe.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the difference in cost between performing modification 1670 to Tornado GR1 and F3 aircraft by means of a contractors' working party as set out in his Department's contracts bulletin, volume 11, No. 2; and assuming sufficient manpower was available, undertaking such work with RAF personnel. [2831]

Mr. Soames: RAF manpower is used to embody aircraft modifications whenever appropriate. On this occasion, the circumstances were such that the use of a contractor's working party allowed the RAF to maximise aircraft availability to the front line. The final contract price is still under negotiation.

Aircraft Maintenance

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions in the past two years a contractors' working party has been sought to carry out work on RAF aircraft because the RAF had insufficient manpower for the task. [2830]

Mr. Soames: The RAF has long used contractor's working parties as an effective means of undertaking specific tasks. A number of factors, including the complexity and specialised nature of the work, or the geographical location, can influence the final decision on whether to use a CWP.

Tractors

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he made of the advantages of leasing the agricultural tractors required by his Department as set out in future purchase number LV2/DBG/03 in his Department's contracts bulletin, volume 11, No. 4. [2832]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The potential benefits of leasing agricultural tractors are being assessed as part of a wider study of the scope for using private finance to meet the requirement for some 4,000 mechanical handling vehicles.

In the meantime, the continuing requirement for agricultural tractors will be met by purchase of vehicles through an enabling contract. This approach offers the most cost-effective way of meeting the continuing requirement by ensuring that my Department is not committed to procuring specific quantities but purchase on an as needed basis.

Bois de Mai Residence

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the selling price of the official service residence, Bois de Mai; when the residence was sold; when the residence was purchased and for what purchase price. [4069]

Mr. Soames: The sale of Bois de Mai was completed on 15 April 1996. The residence was sold unfurnished at close to the asking price of £1.565 million. The residence was originally purchased furnished in November 1992 at a cost of 120,000,000 Belgian francs, which equated to approximately £2.2 million at the then rate of exchange.

Prisoners of War

Sir Michael Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made by his Department in reviewing the pay deductions for British officer prisoners of war held by Germany and Italy during the period 1939 to 1945; and if he will make a statement. [4103]

Mr. Soames: The case for additional refunds for pay deductions from British officer prisoners of war held by the Italians and Germans during world war two was examined and rejected in the early 1980s. Submission of new evidence, however, led to a decision earlier this year to review the position. This work, which includes the related question of pay deduction from protected personnel, will be completed as soon as possible.

Beef

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the country of origin of the beef served to British service personnel in Cyprus and Belize in the last year. [4472]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Beef for British service personnel serving in Cyprus and Belize is procured by local contract to achieve best value for money. Supplies to Cyprus are of southern Irish, French and New Zealand origin, while supplies to Belize are of American origin.

Menwith Hill Station

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will arrange for right hon. and hon. Members to be given access to Menwith Hill station in North Yorkshire. [4581]

Mr. Soames: No. Access to RAF Menwith Hill by right hon. and hon. Members to receive briefings on the station facilities are generally not permitted on the grounds of disruption to the operational activities of the station and for security reasons.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilians have been invited during the past year to visit Menwith Hill station in North Yorkshire. [4582]

Mr. Soames: Approximately 3,800 civilians have visited RAF Menwith Hill within the last year in connection with social and educational events or for local planning reasons. This includes visits by local authority representatives, sports teams, charities, local schools and clubs and those who attended the 4 July open day. Such visits are generally confined to weekends and evenings to ensure they do not impact on the operational activity of the station and access is limited purely to the domestic, recreational and other unrestricted areas of the base.

Major General Prabowo

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to meet Major General Prabowo during his forthcoming visit to Britain. [4701]

Mr. Soames: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence did not meet General Prabowo during his recent visit to the UK.

Indonesian Special Forces

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assistance he proposes to give to the Indonesian special forces to enable them to study at the royal college of defence studies; [4700]

(2) what assistance he proposes to give to the Indonesian special forces to enable them to study at the royal college of defence studies. [4698]

Mr. Soames: In accordance with our long-standing practice, details of military assistance are confidential between Governments.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Comité Européen de Normalisation Electrotechnique

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the names of the members of the Comité Européen de Normalisation Electrotechnique. [4395]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Comité Européen de Normalisation Electotechnique consists of the national standards organisations of the 17 countries of the European economic area and Switzerland. The United Kingdom member is the British electrotechnical committee, which forms an integral part of the British Standards Institution—an independent body incorporated under royal charter.

British Citizens

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the legal protection covering British citizens working abroad; and what assessment he has made of the advantages of introducing protection in British law. [3775]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government have not undertaken an assessment but are aware that different protections apply in other member states of the European Union and other countries. The Government are satisfied with the protections given to employees in this country.

Space Research

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the level of support allocated to space research in each of the last 10 years at current prices. [4060]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 14 November 1996]:* The table gives the total UK civil space expenditure, which is co-ordinated by the British National Space Centre, in each of the last 10 years. The figures given are at 1995–96 prices.

Financial year	*Total £ million*
1986–87	179.08
1987–88	178.82
1988–89	188.21
1989–90	183.63
1990–91	180.75
1991–92	176.58
1992–93	182.32
1993–94	178.59
1994–95	199.05
1995–96	194.89

Aerial Surveys

Mr. Morley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what public funding is provided to Cambridge university in respect of aerial survey activities subsequently offered for sale to the private sector. [4163]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 15 November 1996]:* I understand that the university's activity in this area is self-supporting and does not involve public funds.

Mr. Morley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the procedure for the tendering process by the Natural Environment Research Council for aerial surveys; and when it next intends to tender. [4162]

Mr. Taylor *[holding answer 15 November 1996]:* The NERC airborne remote sensing facility bids on a responsive basis for work requiring the application of its unique set of airborne remote sensing systems. Typically there are approximately 10 such inquiries each year.

The management of the Natural Environment Research Council's aircraft, including its maintenance and the provision of pilots and instrument operators, is contracted out on a five-year basis.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Environmental Auditing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will list the ways in which the Commission has *(a)* demonstrated by example and *(b)* promoted externally, the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing; and if he will make a statement. [4537]

Mr. Beith: All works executed by the Parliamentary Works Directorate are carried out with regard to energy efficiency and environmental impact. The design of the phase 2 new parliamentary building includes the Building

Research Establishment environmental assessment method and the building will have an exceptionally low energy usage.

The Accommodation and Works Committee has approved projects to improve the energy efficiency of the Palace of Westminster including new boilers and a cooling plant. The Parliamentary Works Directorate operates an energy efficiency programme in accordance with the Department of the Environment Energy Efficiency Office guidelines and presents annual reports on savings achieved to Committee. Waste, including paper, arising on the parliamentary estate is recycled. Building work is commissioned using the Department of the Environment guidance on environmental considerations, and the standard specifications used for product selection and contract specification include environmental requirements. Building design and maintenance are carried out in accordance with the guidance issued by the central advisory unit of the Office of Public Service.

Parliamentary Bookshop

Mr. Milburn: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will list the companies which owe arrears to the parliamentary bookshop; and if he will make a statement. [4767]

Mr. Beith: The House of Commons Commission does not normally provide commercially confidential information about customers of the parliamentary bookshop. The accounts of all such companies are at present within their credit limits.

SCOTLAND

Woodlands (Projects)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what further support his Department proposes to promote existing projects currently experimenting with the integration of woodland-based manufacturing economies with an increase in the planting of deciduous woodland; and if he will make a statement on his assessment of the advantages of supporting existing projects; [3226]

(2) what research his Department has *(a)* planned, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* evaluated with regard to integrating proposals to increase deciduous woodland with the creation of woodland-based manufacturing economies; what financial commitments his Department has made in this area; and if he will make a statement. [3230]

Mr. Kynoch: The area of broadleaved woodland in Britain has increased dramatically since the introduction of our broadleaves policy. We recognise the need to ensure that suitable markets for hardwood are readily available to woodland owners. In our recent rural White Papers for Scotland, England and Wales, we outlined our commitments to promoting sustainable woodland management and developing new markets for hardwood products. The Forestry Commission is involved in a range of initiatives including highland birchwoods, Cumbria broadleaves and Coed Cymru, as well as the "WoodLots" marketing information service, all of which are very successful.

We are supporting a number of research projects on broadleaves forest products, including the grading of British hardwoods for structural purposes, the bonding of lower value wood into laminated veneer lumber and improving the potential of wood for fuel. The Forestry Commission currently spends some £300,000 per annum on research on all types of forest products.

Suicides

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of suicides among under-30s, broken down by gender, in Scotland for each year since 1985. [3832]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is given in the table.

Deaths from suicide[1], persons aged under 30 by gender, Scotland, 1985–95[2]

	Both Sexes	*Males*	*Females*
1985	147	116	31
1986	163	136	27
1987	183	139	44
1988	202	160	42
1989	189	143	46
1990	215	177	38
1991	194	153	41
1992	252	195	57
1993	267	219	48
1994	232	186	46
1995	219	176	43

[1] World Health Organisation International Classification of Diseases (9th Revision) codes E950-E959 and E980-E989 (excl. E988.8).
[2] The table presents information on deaths registered in each year.

Cancer Screening (Compensation Claims)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases involving claims against the Argyll and Clyde health board in relation to the mismanagement of the cervical smear screening programme at the Inverclyde Royal hospital, Greenock, have now been settled; what was the average figure of compensation paid to the women concerned; how many cases are still outstanding; and if he will make a statement. [3716]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A total of 12 cases involving claims against the Argyll and Clyde health board as a result of the mis-reading of cervical smear slides at the Inverclyde Royal hospital, Greenock, have now been settled. Negotiations are continuing to achieve a settlement in the remaining eight cases. Once all the claims have been settled, I will be in a position to give an indication of the total amount of the settlement made.

This is being copied for information to the hon. Member for Renfrew West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham).

Ambulance Service (Argyll and Clyde)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he had on *(a)* the installation of a computerised command and control radio system for the Argyll and Clyde health board catchment area and *(b)* the

construction of an ambulance station in Greenock, when he last met the chief executive of the Scottish ambulance service; and if he will make a statement. [3701]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend last met the Chief Executive of the Scottish Ambulance Service NHS trust on 18 October when he opened the service's new training college at Eddleston. The issues referred to by the hon. Member were not discussed, but I can confirm that a computerised command and control system came into use at Paisley ambulance control on 29 September 1996. Work on rolling out the new ambulance radio system into Argyll and Clyde is under way and the system is scheduled to be operational across the area by April 1998.

A replacement ambulance station for Greenock is the top priority building scheme in the Scottish ambulance service's west region. Funds for this purpose have been reserved in the trust's provisional capital programme for 1997–98. Action is currently being taken to identify an appropriate site for the station.

Arable Area Payments

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what area of land was set aside in Scotland in 1995–96 under the arable area scheme. [4227]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Farmers in Scotland set aside 74,258 hectares of land under the 1995 arable area payments scheme.

East Ayrshire Community Hospital

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the costs of the proposals from *(a)* the Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare NHS trust and *(b)* the preferred private finance initiative bidder, for the East Ayrshire community hospital, what further factors have to be taken into account before a decision is made; when he now expects to be able to announce his decision; and if he will make a statement. [4436]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Details of the negotiations between the trust and the preferred PFI bidder are covered by commercial confidentiality. The estimated capital value of the project if £8.6 million. A decision on the project will be announced shortly.

NHS Trusts (Finance)

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how the £30 million for capital expenditure in the health service, announced on 9 October, was distributed among trusts; and which trusts have asked for it to be converted into revenue. [4702]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The £30 million of capital expenditure announced on 9 October has been distributed on a formula basis. This is a formula devised by the management executive which takes into account trust turnover, building depreciation and equipment depreciation.

None of these funds will be transferred to revenue.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the latest estimates of the expenditure on external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [4062]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 14 November 1996]:* The expenditure figures are as follows:

Year	*Expenditure* £	*Expenditure in 1995–96 prices* £
1992–93	4,370,327	4,686,979
1993–94	5,383,000	5,635,351
1994–95	4,079,000	4,177,677
1995–96	5,440,364	5,440,364

Not all of the results of consultancy projects lend themselves to measurement in identifiable savings, but major projects over this period can be summarised as:

Work which assists the development of Government policy, especially by considering a range of strategic options. These projects include requirements such as a survey of the public's views and the benefits tend to be qualitative.

Projects related to the development of new information technology systems. This work has helped the Department to meet its responsibilities while achieving significant reductions in staff numbers.

Work which otherwise assists the implementation of Government policy in Scotland, especially where major changes in the way services are provided are involved. Consultancy assistance in support of the "Competing for Quality" initiative contributed to significant savings for the Department.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many complaints he has received regarding the performance of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration; and what plans he has to introduce legislation proposals to improve the complaints process. [3509]

Mr. Freeman: The parliamentary ombudsman is an independent Officer of the House and reports to the Select Committee chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey). I have occasionally received complaints only about the time taken by the parliamentary ombudsman to complete an investigation: this has not been a significant element of the correspondence handled by my Department, and the number of complaints has not been monitored. I have no plans to introduce legislative proposals on the complaints process.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

International Criminal Court

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what steps the British Government are taking to ensure that a date is set

for the holding of the plenipotentiary diplomatic conference on the establishment of an international criminal court during 1996; [4654]

(2) what assessment he has made of *(a)* progress towards and *(b)* the timetable for the establishment of an international criminal court; and if he will make a statement. [4652]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We are active participants in the process to consider the establishment of an international criminal court. We supported the recommendations of the preparatory committee that up to nine weeks were required for further preparatory work, and that a date for an international conference should be set in 1998. Progress made by the preparatory committee in 1997 will need to be reviewed by next year's general assembly.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has recently received regarding the establishment of an international criminal court. [4653]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We have received representations about the establishment of an international criminal court from hon. Members, non-governmental organisations and members of the public.

Major General Prabowo

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to meet Major General Prabowo during his forthcoming visit to Britain. [4737]

Mr. Hanley: I met General Prabowo on 12 November during his private visit to the UK to thank him on behalf of the British Government for securing the safe release of the four British Hostages in Irian Jaya.

HEALTH

EDS

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many contracts his Department, agencies and associated bodies have had with EDS for each year since 1985; what was the value of each contract; if he will indicate for each contract *(a)* if it was completed, *(b)* what modifications were made at the request of (i) the company and (ii) the Department and *(c)* if work under contract is being undertaken in-house; and if he will make a statement on the number of job reductions in his Department arising from the contracting out of work by EDS. [3815]

Mr. Horam: Neither the Department of Health, nor its agencies and executive non-departmental public bodies have entered into contracts with Electronic Data Systems since 1985. Information on contracts in the Department's non-executive NDPBs and advisory bodies is not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Tattooing and Skin Piercing

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 November, *Official Report*, column *435*, what are the current licensing requirements for skin piercing businesses. [3987]

Mr. Horam: The current licensing requirements for skin piercing businesses in London and in the rest of England and Wales are described in section 3 of "Regulation of Skin Piercing: a Consultation Paper" issued jointly by the Department of Health and the Welsh Office on 3 October 1996. Copies are available in the Library.

Adoption (Guatemala)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the delays incurred by UK citizens waiting to adopt children from Guatemala. [4199]

Mr. Burns: I understand that some prospective adopters who made private arrangements to adopt children from Guatemala have been advised by the Guatemalan authorities that these are not acceptable and that only assessments approved by the United Kingdom Government will be accepted on behalf of United Kingdom citizens. This may have led to some delays in individual cases.

Stroke Treatment

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which health authorities have specialist acute stroke units; [3982]

(2) what percentage of those who have had a stroke in each of the last three years for which figures are available were admitted to hospitals; [3980]

(3) what percentage of those admitted to hospital for strokes in each of the last three years for which figures are available *(a)* died within one month of the original attack and *(b)* died within six months of the original attack. [3981]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities have specialist stroke rehabilitation units. [3983]

Mr. Horam: Health authorities commission appropriate specialist services for their communities in line with their local needs, resources and priorities. Information on what services each health authority commissions is not collected centrally.

Depression

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are being taken to reduce the cost of mental depression to the United Kingdom economy; and what assessment he has made of their effectiveness to date. [3894]

Mr. Burns: Mental illness is one of five key areas in "The Health of the Nation" strategy. The majority of depressive disorders are treated in primary care by general practitioners. We are taking action and promoting initiatives to improve the diagnosis and treatment of the condition in primary care. For example, we are working to develop GP training in the recognition and management of depression and to encourage audit of the management of the condition in primary care; in addition, we collaborated with the Royal College of General

Practitioners and the Royal College of Psychiatrists on the recent "defeat depression" campaign, which aimed to improve detection and prevention of the condition.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 October 1996, *Official Report*, column *759*, if he will commission research into the impact of mental depression on the United Kingdom's economy; and if he will make a statement. [3896]

Mr. Burns: We are already undertaking a range of research into depression. For example, the Department's policy research programme has commissioned a number of studies into severe mental illness, many of which are related to depression. We expect to spend some £500,000 on these studies in 1996–97. In addition, we have made £2.4 million available over the next five years within the policy research programme's mental health research initiative. Many of the commissioned studies within the initiative relate to depression. Work currently being undertaken by the personal social services research unit under the policy research programme is looking at the economic impact of mental disorders, which include depression. The Medical Research Council, the main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research, has a comprehensive portfolio of research on depressive illness. In particular, it funds a number of trials which examine different types of treatment and therapies for depression. Total funding for this research amounted to almost £0.9 million in 1994–95.

Ambulance Response Times

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the maximum ambulance response times *(a)* in an emergency, *(b)* for discharge from hospital and *(c)* for an out-patient attendance. [3895]

Mr. Horam: At present all ambulance services in England are expected to respond to 50 per cent. of emergency calls within eight minutes. Urban ambulance services are expected to respond to 95 per cent. of emergency calls within 14 minutes and rural services within 19 minutes.

There are no national standards of discharge or outpatient attendances but local standards may be included in individual contracts for patient transport services.

Special Advisers

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many special advisers are employed by his Department; and if he will list their names. [3932]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health employs two special advisers, Mr. Tony Hockley and Mr. Tim Rycroft.

Hip Replacement and Appointment Cost

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current average cost of *(a)* a hip replacement operation and *(b)* an out-patient's appointment in the NHS in England. [3934]

Mr. Horam: In 1994–95 the average cost in England of an out-patient attendance was £57.40. The information requested on hip replacement operations is not available centrally.

MRSA

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department has given trusts and health authorities to methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus. [3921]

Mr. Horam: The Department issued guidance to the national health service in September 1994 on the control of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus and in March 1995 on the general control of infections in hospitals. In May 1996, the Department issued new guidance on the control of infection in residential and nursing homes and a leaflet "MRSA: what nursing and residential homes need to know". Copies of this guidance are in the Library.

Children at Risk

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by local authority, the funds currently allocated by his Department to fund local authority services for children who are at risk. [3978]

Mr. Burns: The total provision made for English local authorities in respect of children's services (including services for children at risk) amounts in the current financial year to £1,754.7 million. This provision, however, is not hypothecated and it is for individual local authorities to determine their own spending priorities in the light of local needs. In addition, grants totalling £9.3 million are also available to local authorities in 1996–97 for services provided by guardians ad litem and for services provided to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

European Health Ministers (Meetings)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the dates on which European Health Ministers are to meet in the next six months and the subjects to be discussed. [4696]

Mr. Malone: The Health Council is due to meet in Luxembourg on 2 June 1997 under the forthcoming Dutch presidency of the European Union. The subjects to be discussed will not be agreed until nearer that date. No other formal meetings of European Community Health Ministers are currently planned during the next six months. European Health Ministers may attend the world health assembly in Geneva provisionally scheduled for 5 to 16 May 1997.

Beef and Milk (Bacteria)

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action the Government have taken to inform the public about the health effects of E. coli 0157:117 bacteria in beef and unpasteurised milk; [3712]

(2) what information the Government have issued to health service providers concerning the public health effects of E. coli 0157:117 bacteria in beef and unpasteurised milk. [3714]

Mr. Horam: The Government act to improve food safety through a combination of legislation, codes of practice and advice, including leaflets. This is directed at the professions and the public, especially those in

vulnerable groups. We attach great importance to the wide dissemination of information to ensure the importance of safe handling of food is understood by all. This information is relevant to all the organisms which cause food poisoning, including E. coli 0157.

Thorough cooking of food will destroy these organisms and this is stressed in all the advice we give. Members of the vulnerable groups are also advised to avoid uncooked food which carries a high risk of contamination.

The Chief Medical Officer has recommended that beefburgers should be cooked until the juices run clear and there are no pink bits inside. This advice was first given in 1991 and has been repeated since. We have recently revised the leaflet, "While you are pregnant: safe eating and how to avoid infection from food and from contact with animals" which gives advice on safe eating including raw meat and unpasteurised milk. This advice is repeated in the Health Education Authority's pregnancy book. The Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food have issued similar advice through their "Foodsense" leaflets. We have also published general guidance in "Food Handlers Fitness to Work: Guidance for Food Businesses, Enforcement Officers and Health Professionals". Copies of all these publications are in the Library.

Clinical Trials

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring procedures his Department and the Medicines Control Agency follow to ensure that the conduct of phase 1 clinical trials is in compliance with good clinical practice guidelines. [3872]

Mr. Malone: In accordance with advice from the Medicines Commission, phase 1 clinical trials are self-regulated by the professional concerned. The Department and its Medicines Control Agency have no procedures to monitor the conduct of these trials.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what responsibility the Licensing Authority has for the conduct of phase 1 clinical trials in healthy volunteers. [3877]

Mr. Horam: Studies on healthy volunteers are not clinical trials within the definition of the Medicines Act 1968 and therefore are not subject to regulation by the licensing authority.

In the United Kingdom, studies on healthy volunteers are self-regulated by the medical profession and pharmaceutical industry. The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry established a committee in 1969 to investigate and advise on medical experiments involving pharmaceutical company staff volunteers and published a set of guidelines in 1970 which were updated in 1984 and 1990. The Royal College of Physicians published a report, "Research on Healthy Volunteers", October 1986 which made a number of recommendations to those involved in conducting healthy volunteer studies.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what procedures *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Licensing Authority and *(c)* the Medicines Control Agency follow to ensure safety of volunteers in phase 1 clinical trials; [3878]

(2) what procedures *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Medicines Control Agency follow to ensure appropriate monitoring of ethics committees considering and approving phase 1 clinical trials. [3879]

Mr. Horam: Most phase 1 clinical trials are carried out for pharmaceutical companies. Under Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry guidelines they must first have obtained the approval of an independent research ethics committee. These guidelines require independent research ethics committees to prepare an annual report in accordance with recommendations from the Royal College of Physicians. Where, less commonly, it is proposed to undertake these trials in the national health service, the approval of a local research ethics committee must be obtained. The Department of Health issued guidance to the NHS on the operation of LRECs in 1991, HSG(91)5, copies of which were placed in the Library.

Vaccinations

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made in his Department's review of the vaccinations available on the NHS. [3873]

Mr. Horam: As with all policies, we review the arrangement for vaccines on an on-going basis. In particular we are considering the inconsistencies and ambiguities that have arisen in the arrangements for travel vaccines over the years as new vaccines have been developed and new recommendations for vaccine use have been implemented. The review of the current arrangements is an on-going one and any changes in policy will be communicated to those with an interest.

Hepatitis B

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals in the United Kingdom undertake mandatory ante-natal screening for hepatitis B. [3874]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) on 22 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *118*.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the number of hepatitis B carriers in the United Kingdom. [3875]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Halifax (Ms. Mahon) on 12 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *559*.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of hepatitis B carrier is accounted for by "at risk" groups. [3876]

Mr. Horam: There are no national data collected on the number of chronic carriers of hepatitis B that fall into "high risk" groups. The Public Health Laboratory Service communicable disease surveillance centre receives reports of acute hepatitis B infection through the voluntary confidential reporting by laboratories of confirmed cases. Information on risk exposure is available with approximately two thirds of these reports. For details, by former regional health authority for the three years

1993–95, I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) on 22 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *120–21*.

Pensioners' Health Care Costs

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost per annum to public funds of the health care costs of *(a)* the average retirement pensioner and *(b)* a retirement pensioner in the last two years of their life; and what proportion *(c)* constitutes of an individual's life-time health care costs. [4381]

Mr. Burns: Figures showing the annual cost of the health care of retirement pensioners are not collected. However, hospital and community health services expenditure for people aged 65 and over was estimated at £1,195 per person in 1994–95.

Statistics on the cost to public funds of health care in the last two years of a retired person's life are not available.

Statistical Information

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to publish the 1995 public health common data set *(a)* on disk and *(b)* in print. [4766]

Mr. Horam: The 1995 public health common data set containing data for 1994 was released last year on disk. The printed version was published in April 1996. Both versions have been placed in the Library.

The 1996 public health common data set containing data for 1995 was sent to health authorities on 15 November 1996. The printed version will be published three months later. A set of the disks is being placed in the Library.

Health Service White Paper

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what actions he proposes to take in respect of his White Paper on the health service published on 13 November, in respect of *(a)* legislation, *(b)* adjustment of methods on formulae relating to distribution of resources between health authorities and *(c)* recruitment and training of more doctors and nurses. [4550]

Mr. Malone: "A Service with Ambitions", the White Paper on the national health service published on 13 November, reaffirms the Government's commitment to the NHS on the basis of its founding principles. It launches three nationally-led development programmes on information, professional development and managing for quality in the NHS. These programmes will aim to refine and improve existing policies, ensuring they are part of a coherent strategy, and to identify ways of overcoming practical obstacles to progress.

In addition to the publication of the White Paper, the Government will be introducing a Bill to take forward the proposals in "Choice and Opportunity" this Session, keeping the formulae used to inform the allocation of resources to health authorities under continual review, supporting medical work force planning, and supporting the commissioning of non-medical education and training through consortia and regional education and development groups. Nurse training commissions are expected to rise 14 per cent. in 1996–97.

TRANSPORT

Motorway Cleaning

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the total budget for cleaning motorways; and on what basis funds are allocated to the appropriate authorities; [4097]

(2) what targets his Department has set the Highways Agency in respect of cleaning motorways. [4096]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. James Pawsey, dated 18 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent questions asking what is the total budget for cleaning motorways; on what basis funds are allocated to the appropriate authorities; and what targets the Highways Agency has been set in respect of cleaning motorways. I shall answer these in reverse order.

The Agency has been set the target of cleaning litter from motorways to the standards set out in the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (the EPA). This legislation is based on the concept of four grades of cleanliness: A (no litter) to D (heavily littered). If the standard falls to grade C (widespread distribution of litter), the Agency is required to restore to grade A (for paved areas) or grade B (for grassed verges) within four weeks. If the standard falls to grade D, the Agency is required to restore the area to grade A or B, as appropriate, within one week.

The Highways Agency delegates the management of motorway cleaning to its Maintaining Agents, most of whom are local highway authorities. They are required to work to the Agency's Code of Practice for Routine Maintenance. This advises that the standards set out in the EPA can best be achieved by a programme of routine litter scavenges. In previous years fund have been allocated to Maintaining Agents to enable them to take this proactive approach and to achieve high standards of cleanliness.

M6 (Lighting)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the motorway lighting on the M6 will be extended from its junction with the M1 to junction 3 of the M6. [4098]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. James Pawsey, dated 18 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about M6 motorway lighting between the M1/M6 Interchange and Junction 3.

In my letter to you of 20 December 1995, I advised that we had no plans to light the M6 between these junctions.

We have again reviewed the overnight safety record for this section of motorway over the last three years and the position remains the same. We cannot justify extending the existing lighting provision to this area.

However, as I said in my last reply, all sections of the motorway and trunk road network are the subject of periodic review and factors could emerge at some stage in the future which may be significant and be such to justify the Agency taking a fresh look at the lighting need.

Traffic Delays

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reports he receives on a daily basis of expected and of unexpected traffic delays on national roads. [4358]

Mr. Watts: Monitoring the flow of traffic on the trunk network is an operational matter which is the responsibility of the Highways Agency. The Highways Agency provides the Secretary of State with reports of severe weather conditions and their impact on the trunk road network, and of major road accidents involving several fatalities, hazardous substances or serious structural damage.

Additionally, the Secretary of State's private office staff have access to several sources of publicly available continuous traffic information.

Road Maintenance

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been spent on capital maintenance on national roads in each of the past 10 years; and how much other money was available each year for national roads. [4359]

Mr. Watts: The following table shows actual expenditure on the capital maintenance of roads from 1986–87 to 1995–96. Also shown is the figure for other money budgeted for capital and current programme expenditure on national roads.

£ million

Year	*Capital Maintenance Roads*	*Other money budgeted for national roads*
1986–87	180.6	755.5
1987–88	213.3	757.3
1988–89	129.4	944.6
1989–90	240.4	1,235.0
1990–91	288.7	1,639.2
1991–92	306.6	1,720.6
1992–93	364.5	1,751.0
1993–94	404.3	1,844.4
1994–95	402.2	1,820.7
1995–96	309.7	1,627.3

Merchant Shipping (Deregulation)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to issue deregulation orders relating to the rates of pay for crew members aboard merchant ships. [4115]

Mr. Bowis: There are currently no plans to issue any deregulation orders in respect of seamen's rates of pay.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to issue deregulation orders relating to crew accommodation aboard merchant ships. [4114]

Mr. Bowis: Current Merchant Shipping (Crew Accommodation) Regulations have been considered in the context of the regulatory review of merchant shipping legislation. The aim has been to remove material which is over-specified and unnecessarily detailed, so far as is consistent with safety and with international treaty obligations which, in this case, are International Labour Organisation conventions 92 and 133. The Marine Safety Agency has recently undertaken formal consultation with the shipping industry on the draft Merchant Shipping (Crew Accommodation) Regulations 1996. These are not intended to reduce the present standards of accommodation or to remove provisions which go beyond the requirements of ILO conventions but to make the regulations more flexible and to make it possible for new solutions to be sought to current problems whilst maintaining existing standards of accommodation.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to issue deregulation orders relating to the plimsoll line. [4113]

Mr. Bowis: Current Merchant Shipping (Load Line) Regulations have been considered in the context of the regulatory review of merchant shipping legislation. The aim has been to remove material which is over-specified and unnecessarily detailed, so far as is consistent with safety. The Marine Safety Agency has recently completed formal consultation with the shipping industry on the draft Merchant Shipping (Load Line) Regulations 1996.

Nuclear Material (Sea Transport)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the transcript of the special consultative meeting held by the International Maritime Organisation in March on the environmental and safety aspects of the transport of irradiated nuclear fuel and other nuclear materials by sea. [2705]

Mr. Bowis: I have today placed in the Library a copy of the most recent draft of the proceedings of the special consultative meeting. A finalised version will be placed in the Library when it has been adopted by the International Maritime Organisation.

Rail Routeing Guide

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will use his powers under the Railway Act 1993 before the end of 1996 to give guidance to the Rail Regulator that the routeing guide must not restrict reasonable routes to any greater extent than was the case before the guide came into effect. [4549]

Mr. Watts: The routeing guide has been issued on a trial basis until May 1997, to give an opportunity for errors and omissions to be corrected. The Rail Regulator and the Franchising Director have already given assurances that they will not approve a guide which unduly restricts the routeing flexibility that passengers enjoy.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Project Work

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list *(a)* the offices and *(b)* the budget allocated for the Stoke on Trent project work pilot scheme; and what are the arrangements for the local administration of the scheme. [4366]

Mr. Forth: *(a)* There are nine Employment Service jobcentres in the Stoke on Trent travel-to-work area. These are Stoke on Trent, Burslem, Cheadle, Hanley, Kidsgrove, Longton, Newcastle under Lyme, Leek and Uttoxeter. *(b)* £100 million has been allocated to operate the pilots, for up to 100,000 people across the country. The pilots will be administered by the Employment Service, through local jobcentres. The Employment Service will ensure that sufficient funds are made available in each travel-to-work area to cover the numbers entering the target group for the pilots, and the help which they accept.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many of those claimants referred to adjudication for refusal or failure to attend project work have *(a)* received a benefit sanction and *(b)* been adjudged to have good cause, broken down by the categories of good cause listed in the adjudication officers' guide. [4429]

Mr. Forth: In general, people whose actions fall under the categories of good cause listed in the adjudication officers' guide and in regulation 73 of the Jobseekers Allowance Regulations 1996 will be identified by a project work adviser in the local jobcentre, and not referred to an independent adjudication officer. In judging cases referred to them, sector adjudication officers are not restricted to the list referred to above, but can use their discretion to assess each case on an individual basis. To date, in every case where a sector adjudication officer has made a decision on a case referred for refusal to attend project work, a benefit sanction has been imposed. In 64 per cent. of cases where a decision has been made following referral on the grounds of failure to attend project work a benefit sanction has been imposed. The remainder of cases have been adjudged to have had a good cause.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the comparative areas used for evaluation of the existing project work pilot schemes and the monthly returns from April 1996 in respect of claimants leaving the register in pilot and comparative areas broken down by duration of unemployment. [4430]

Mr. Forth: The comparison offices are Fakenham, Barton on Humber, Chapeltown, Great Yarmouth, Hillsborough, Newport, Cardigan, Portsmouth, Portsmouth North, Cosham, Newhaven, and Stretford.

On the latest available verified figures, 1,418 people left the pilot and stopped claiming benefit in the pilot areas, by the end of September, while 413 people had left benefit in the control offices. All these people have been unemployed for over two years. Over 400 of those who have left the register in the pilot areas had been out of work for more than four years, compared with 94 in the control areas. Ninety-eight of those leaving in pilot areas had not worked for over six years, compared with only nine people in the control areas.

These figures apply to all those who had entered the pilot by the end of September, including many who had only just entered.

A breakdown of these figures by month produces numbers too small to allow reliable conclusions to be drawn. A report based on the monitoring information will be made available in the new year, when there is sufficient data available to allow a more in-depth analysis.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many of the job outcomes achieved by project work participants since inception of the scheme were *(a)* full-time permanent employment, *(b)* part-time employment, *(c)* self-employment and *(d)* temporary employment. [4431]

Mr. Forth: Early results show that 20 per cent. of those who enter the pilot find a job before they complete the process. Further information is not yet available. A detailed statistical survey is being carried out on a sample of leavers from project work and this will provide information on these, and other, issues. The results of this survey will be available at the end of 1997.

Young People's Services

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance has been issued for use by *(a)* the voluntary sector and *(b)* Church groups who operate services for young people. [4289]

Mr. Paice: The Department issues guidance to national voluntary youth organisations, including Church bodies, on its scheme of grants to those organisations. This includes advice on how to bid for funding and on good practice in voluntary youth work.

Independent Schools

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to introduce measures to require elected parent representatives on governing bodies of independent schools; and if she will make a statement. [4365]

Mrs. Gillan: We have no plans to legislate to interfere in this way in the constitution of independent schools' governing bodies.

Teacher Education

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to prescribe *(a)* the content and *(b)* teaching methods for teacher education. [4439]

Mr. Forth: On 18 September, my right hon. Friend announced the introduction of a national curriculum for initial teacher training, starting with primary English and mathematics. It will specify what teachers need to be taught about their subject; what pupils should be taught; effective teaching and assessment methods, and how and when to use them; and the standards of pupil achievement they should expect.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the cost of re-inspection of the 20 initial teacher education departments in higher education institutions; in what ways the criteria for the re-inspection are different for the criteria for the first inspection; for how many and which HEI teacher education departments the initial

inspections have not been completed; and what criteria were used in choosing the 20 initial teacher education departments for re-inspection. [4438]

Mr. Forth: This is a matter for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Adjudication Officers

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the staff grade of local adjudication officers based in jobcentres; and what duties other than adjudication they are expected to undertake. [4432]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Grover to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 18 November 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me, in the absence of the Chief Executive, to reply to your question about Labour Market Adjudication Officers.

The Labour Market Adjudication Officer (LMAO) role exists purely to decide questions arising on claims for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). Only a small number of labour market adjudication questions will be decided in Jobcentres, and decisions on these questions will only be given by selected ES people who have been trained as LMAOs. The selection of people to perform this task is at the discretion of business managers and, when making their selection, the specific features of LMAO work will be a key consideration.

We do not expect there to be a need for the LMAO role to be carried out on a full-time basis, although this may change over time. The function will normally be performed by an adviser or a back to work team leader, in addition to their usual duties.

The grading of each individual post depends, therefore, on its content and it would not be right to assume that everyone carrying out the LMAO function should be allocated to the same pay band. In some situations, it may be that the additional LMAO responsibilities are sufficient to take the particular post into the next higher pay band. LMAO duties are, therefore, carried out by people in Management Pay Bands 5, 6 or 7, depending on the precise combination of duties.

It will take time for JSA and the role of the LMAO to settle down. Once a position of stability has been reached, we would expect a re-evaluation of individual posts to be carried out as appropriate.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place in the Library copies of *(a)* the central adjudication services guidance on jobseeker's allowance used by sector adjudication officers, *(b)* the Employment Service guidance on jobseeker's allowance used by local adjudication officers in jobcentres and *(c)* the volumes entitled "Local Office Adjudication and Adjudication Procedural Guidance" [4433]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Craven to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 18 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me, in the absence of the Chief Executive, to write to you concerning the placement in the Library of copies of the Central Adjudication Services guidance on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) used by sector adjudication officers, Employment Service guidance on JSA used by local adjudication officers in Jobcentres and the volumes entitled, Local Office Adjudication and Adjudication Procedural Guidance.

My understanding is that the Central Adjudication Service have placed guidance on Jobseeker's Allowance used by their sector adjudication officers in the Library.

The guidance manuals you requested on Adjudication Procedural Guidance, Labour Market Adjudication Officer Procedural Guidance and Local Office Adjudication have not been made available. This is in accordance with Part 7 para (a) and (b) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

I hope this is helpful.

Pre-school Education

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for what reasons *(a)* private nurseries, *(b)* playgroups and *(c)* local education authority schools for under-fives are not subject to uniform (i) regulations and (ii) standards imposed by a single body. [4551]

Mr. Robin Squire: The regulation of different institutions is designed to correspond to the type of service they provide. Maintained schools provide education and are bound by education legislation. Private nurseries and playgroups offer day care as well as education for very young children and are therefore required to register under the Children Act 1989.

Surplus Places

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each local education authority in England the number of surplus places and the money allocated to removing them using the latest available data. [4728]

Mr. Robin Squire: For the number of surplus places in each local education authority, I refer the hon. Member to the reply the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on Tuesday 19 March 1996, *Official Report*, columns *113–18*.

One of our priorities for capital allocations is supporting cost-effective surplus place removal projects. The following table shows the amount allocated in 1995–96 and 1996–97, in response to local education authority bids, for the first year costs of new surplus place removal projects.

Allocations for new surplus place removal projects

£000

	1995–96	*1996–97*
Avon	4,929	—
Barnsley	2,725	671
Bedfordshire	243	495
Berkshire	0	461
Bexley	175	0
Birmingham	1,077	1,290
Bolton	0	574

Allocations for new surplus place removal projects

£000

	1995–96	*1996–97*
Bradford	346	750
Brent	14	0
Bristol	—	108
Buckinghamshire	57	467
Calderdale	0	115
Cambridgeshire	127	469
Cheshire	443	20
Cleveland	275	—
Cornwall	656	0
Coventry	120	379
Cumbria	1,180	870
Derbyshire	610	0
Devon	2	0
Doncaster	7,472	355
Durham	133	802
Ealing	0	241
East Sussex	300	1,335
Essex	1,278	1,601
Gateshead	2,500	530
Greenwich	61	741
Hackney	100	750
Hampshire	1,457	3,167
Havering	15	0
Hereford and Worcester	0	116
Hertfordshire	0	173
Humberside	1,477	—
Kent	2,663	0
Kirklees	165	398
Knowsley	50	110
Lambeth	50	0
Lancashire	35	40
Leeds	0	3,590
Liverpool	505	990
Manchester	400	240
Norfolk	387	376
Northamptonshire	340	50
North Tyneside	280	198
Northumberland	528	151
North Yorkshire	425	0
Nottinghamshire	638	805
Oxfordshire	336	495
Rochdale	0	73
Rotherham	25	281
St. Helens	0	366
Salford	435	630
Sandwell	0	610
Sefton	78	88
Sheffield	63	737
Shropshire	168	62
South Tyneside	665	400
Stockport	225	0
Sunderland	1,420	569
Trafford	0	50
Wakefield	168	120
Warwickshire	7,925	0
Wigan	1,704	50
Wiltshire	0	92
Wirral	0	665
Wolverhampton	269	1,065
York	—	25
Total	47,719	29,806

1996–97 allocations for Bristol and Cheshire are currently held in reserve pending decisions on statutory proposals.

Full-time Education

Mr, Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of 16 and 17-year-olds in England are in full-time education. [5031]

Mr. Paice: There were 70.7 per cent. of 16-year-olds and 59.3 per cent. of 17-year-olds in full-time education in England in 1995–96—provisional figures.

Nursery Inspections

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many nursery settings have been *(a)* passed and *(b)* failed by the inspectors; [4929]

(2) if she will place in the Library a list of the establishments registering to redeem nursery vouchers, which have been inspected thus far; [4930]

(3) how many of the establishments registering to redeem nursery vouchers, due to be inspected by March 1996, have so far been inspected; [4931]

(4) what are the criteria used to assess the quality of the inspection work of the nursery inspectors; and how the work will be monitored; [4932]

(5) how many applications have been received for the post of nursery inspector and how many applications have been approved as nursery inspectors; [4933]

(6) if she will list the inspection contractors which have been appointed by the contracting administrator for the nursery voucher scheme. [4934]

Mr. Robin Squire: These are matters for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Tourism

13. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her policy on tourism; and if she will make a statement. [2846]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are six main elements to my Department's tourism policy: championing and raising the profile of tourism; increasing competitiveness; improving the quality of the tourism product; developing a world-class human resource; making marketing more effective; and managing the impact of tourism. My Department and the tourist boards are now working with an industry forum to develop by early next year a new strategy based on these elements.

Midweek Lottery Draw

14. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received in respect of the proposed introduction of the midweek lottery; and if she will make a statement. [2847]

27. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many representations she has received on the subject of an additional weekly national lottery draw; and if she will make a statement. [2862]

Mr. Sproat: My Department has received 16 letters from right hon. and hon. Members and 130 from members of the public on the subject of a mid-week Lottery. The licensing of a midweek draw was a matter for the Director General of the National Lottery, subject to the provisions set out in section 4 of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993.

Millennium Funds (Plymouth)

15. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received regarding bids for millennium funds in respect of Plymouth. [2848]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Millennium Commission, of which I am chairman, has received representations regarding Plymouth 2000 Partnership's bid "Plymouth Waterfront—A Celebration of Discovery", which is still under consideration, from the port of Plymouth, the West Country tourist board, Plymouth Marketing Bureau, and five individuals. One individual was opposed to the project.

The Commission is always pleased to hear of support or otherwise for a project, and this is one of the key criteria used in assessing applications for funding.

Sport

16. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on her Department's funding for sport. [2849]

Mr. Sproat: The Department's funding provision for sport in 1996–97 is £52 million. In addition, the National lottery sports fund has provided funding for sport in England of £305 million to date and £368 million for the UK as a whole.

17. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she is taking to encourage young people to participate in sporting activities. [2850]

Mr. Sproat: The Government's policy statement, "Sport: Raising the Game", published in July 1995, sets out our plans for putting sport back at the heart of school life, promoting links between schools and clubs and establishing a new British academy of sport as the pinnacle of a regional network of centres of sporting excellence and academies for particular sports. In July this year, we published "Sport: Raising the Game—the First Year Report", which reports progress on all these initiatives. Work is continuing on the various initiatives and a further announcement of progress will be made in the new year.

Dance and Drama Students

18. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representation she has received since her recent statement on the training of dance and drama students. [2851]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I was delighted that on 14 October I was able to announce plans to help more students to take up places at accredited dance and drama training schools in England. My Department has since received a number of letters, mainly from members of the public, on this subject. The Arts Council of England is in the process of formulating the operational details of the new scheme, in close consultation with local authority associations. The House will, I hope, join me in congratulating the Arts Council on having identified an ingenious interim solution to this problem.

South Bank Ferris Wheel

19. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the advantages of providing millennium fund assistance for the ferris wheel proposed for the south bank. [2852]

Mrs. Bottomley: Neither the Millennium Commission nor the Government has received any requests for funding for the proposal to build a ferris wheel on the south bank. I understand that the proposed scheme is to be funded entirely by the private sector.

Arts Sponsorship

20. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she is taking to promote business sponsorship of the arts. [2853]

Mr. Sproat: My Department actively encourages private sector support for the arts. The National Heritage arts sponsorship scheme—the pairing scheme—has brought in more than £110 million in new money to the arts since it started in 1984. We also give financial support to Business in the Arts' "board bank" scheme, launched earlier this year by my right hon. Friend, which encourages senior managers to offer their skills to arts organisations on a voluntary basis. The Department's policy document, "Setting the Scene", highlighted the importance of business sponsorship as part of a plural funding system for the arts.

Volunteering

21. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what action her Department is taking to promote volunteering. [2854]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My Department supports, promotes and encourages volunteering in a wide variety of ways. Under the "make a difference" initiative £20 million is being used in the direct funding of projects, and to extend and strengthen the network of volunteer bureaux. These projects run from the most local—such as anti-bullying projects in schools, run by the pupils themselves—to the national—such as the national volunteering helpline and interactive computer databases of volunteering opportunities. Outstanding volunteering action is recognised through the "make a difference"/Whitbread awards. I have also recently launched a new grant programme to help local, volunteer-run community groups to become more effective. The "make a difference" initiative is making it easier for people to volunteer, and encouraging the development of many more volunteering opportunities.

Volunteering is a theme which runs through much of my Department's work. Both museums and the sporting world, for instance, are dependent on the efforts of an army of willing volunteers, and I am determined to support this in every way possible. I was particularly pleased at the recent publication by the Sports Council of its survey report, "Valuing Volunteers in Sport". My Department is also working with the national lottery distribution bodies to ensure that they recognise the role of volunteers in their grant-giving. Finally, through the ministerial group on volunteering and the voluntary sector, I co-ordinate the policy and practice on volunteering of the Government as a whole—for instance,

Departments are currently updating their "make a difference" action plans, originally published in October last year.

Cornish Cultural Life

22. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what new proposals she has to encourage studies into Cornish cultural life. [2856]

Mr. Sproat: At present my right hon. Friend has no proposals for studies relating to Cornish cultural life. Nor do the Arts Council of England or the South West Regional Arts Board.

Academy of Sport

23. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects to make an announcement on the location for the national British academy of sport; and if she will make a statement on the procedure for deciding on the location of regional sports centres. [2857]

Mr. Sproat: Twenty-six bids have now been received for the British academy of sport, and we hope to make an announcement on the location early in the new year. Details of the Government's proposals for the regional institutes will be included in the prospectus which we aim to launch in early spring next year.

National Lottery

24. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the effects of the national lottery on bodies funding sports and the arts. [2858]

Mr. Sproat: To date, the national lottery distributing bodies responsible for making grants to sport and the arts have made 3,950 awards for a total of £1,014.3 million. The injection of such large sums into these sectors in such a short space of time is nothing short of a revolution.

25. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the latest assessment she has made of the revenue implications of capital grants made under the national lottery scheme for the arts, charities and sport. [2859]

Mrs. Bottomley: The lottery distributing bodies must consider the viability and revenue implications of any capital projects which they support. They may provide revenue funding through endowments or in the form of revenue grants, where this is necessary to complete a capital project.

Digital Terrestrial Television

26. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the progress of digital terrestrial television. [2861]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The UK remains on target for the early introduction of the first digital terrestrial television services in the world. I am very grateful for the prodigious efforts of the ITC in achieving this progress in implementing the Broadcasting Act 1996. All the terrestrial broadcasters who were offered guaranteed capacity on digital multiplexes by the Government have indicated to the Independent Television Commission that they intend to take up that capacity. On 31 October, the ITC invited applications to operate the four digital multiplexes not pre-assigned. Those applications must be submitted by 31 January 1997. The commission hopes to award the licences shortly thereafter, and intends that all licensees should begin their services by 1 July 1998 at the latest.

Independent Radio Operators

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what responsibility she has for the allocation of public airwaves to independent radio operators. [3900]

Mr. Sproat: Under the terms of the Broadcasting Acts 1990 and 1996, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State assigns a range of frequencies to the Radio Authority for the provision of independent radio services. Responsibility for planning the use of this spectrum to deliver a range of national and local services is a matter for the Radio Authority under the terms of the Broadcasting Acts.

Football Grounds

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many nationwide league football clubs' grounds need major work to bring them up to the standards of the Taylor report in *(a)* nationwide league division one, *(b)* nationwide league division two and *(c)* nationwide league division three. [3766]

Mr. Sproat: The Football Trust estimates that there are 37 clubs in the Nationwide League whose grounds require improvements to meet Government requirements on all-seating or safe terracing. Of these clubs, seven are in division 1, 14 are in division 2, and 16 are in division 3.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what assessment she has made of the improvements needed to football grounds in the nationwide league to enable them to reach Taylor report standards in respect of *(a)* terracing and seating, *(b)* barriers, *(c)* lighting and *(d)* other safety issues; and what estimates she has made of the cost in respect of each of these categories; [3807]

(2) what estimate she has made of the costs for nationwide league football clubs who need to carry out major work to bring their grounds up to the standards of the Taylor report, in *(a)* nationwide league division one, *(b)* nationwide league division two and *(c)* nationwide league division three. [3703]

Mr. Sproat: Most clubs in Nationwide League division 1 meet the Government's requirements on all-seating. Those few that do not have either been granted an extension to the deadline, on account of their having been recently promoted, or are relocating to new stadia. Clubs in divisions 2 and 3 are not required to go all-seated, but those that choose not to do so will have to meet certain minimum standards for standing terraces by August 1999. A survey is currently being carried out by the Football Licensing Authority to ascertain precisely what will be necessary at each ground to satisfy this minimum requirement.

Medical Scanners

Sir Julian Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many scanners have been purchased from the proceeds of national lottery money. [4269]

Mr. Sproat: No medical scanners have been purchased with national lottery funds.

Regional Sports Centres of Excellence

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to establish regional sporting centres of excellence; and if she will make a statement. [3216]

Mr. Sproat: Details of the Government's proposals for regional centres of sporting excellence will be early next year.

Film Industry

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions she has had with representatives of the film industry. [2855]

Mr. Sproat: My right hon. Friend has regular discussions with representatives of the film industry on a wide range of film-related issues. Specifically, this summer she visited the United States of America, where she met leading figures from the American film industry including representatives from MCA, Warner Brothers and the Motion Picture Association of America.

More recently, my right hon. Friend attended the Edinburgh film festival, visited Shepperton studios and the Warner Brothers feature animation studio in central London, visited the set of the feature film "Wilde", at the invitation of the producers, and attended the opening of the London film festival as a guest of the British Film Institute.

Sports Sponsorship

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what has been the financial level of sponsorship for sport in each of the last five years at 1996 prices; and what assessment she has made of the effect of the national lottery on sponsorship levels. [2922]

Mr. Sproat: The estimated size of the UK sports sponsorship market for the last five completed years, at 1996 prices, is shown in the table. No assessment has been made of the effect of the national lottery on sponsorship levels. Some £58 million of private sector funding has been attracted to support lottery projects.

Estimated size of the UK sports sponsorship market

£ million

Year	*Amount*	*At 1996–97 prices*
1991	238	272
1992	239	262
1993	250	266
1994	265	278
1995	285	291

Football Trust

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the finances of the Football Trust. [2835]

Mr. Sproat: Since 1990 the Government have made £138 million available to the Football Trust to grant aid clubs' ground development projects, through a reduction in pool betting duty that the pools companies pass on to the trust. The trust's income from this source has fallen since the introduction of the national lottery. From last May, the trust has benefitted from a further ½ per cent. reduction in pool betting duty worth up to £3 million per year.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

33. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he last met the Law Society to discuss legal aid. [2869]

Mr. Streeter: I refer the hon. gentleman to the answer I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien).

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much legal aid was granted to *(a)* foreign nationals and *(b)* the indigenous population in each of the last three years; to how many individuals; and if he will make a statement. [3217]

Mr. Streeter: Information as to an applicant's nationality is not collected and is therefore not available. The Legal Aid Board does maintain a record of applications received from applicants resident outside the United Kingdom, but information on the cost to legal aid of those cases could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the total sum which may be made available to solicitors through the legal aid scheme in advance of the appropriate determination of the size of legal costs to be determined in legal aid cases; and if he will assess the advantages of charging interest payments on these sums in the last available year. [4729]

Mr. Streeter: Lawyers may claim on account 75 per cent. of the costs they estimate they have incurred for each of the first three years of a case. In 1995–96, of 372,611 bills paid, there had been overpayments of payments on account on 15,317 bills. The average overpayment was £552. Any overpayment is recovered, or more likely, set off against other payments due from the Legal Aid Board. Systems are in place to detect abuses and the Legal Aid Board actively pursues solicitors who abuse the scheme. The large majority of payments on account are however properly made for work properly done and there are no plans to introduce further costly systems in order to recover interest in the few cases where this would be appropriate.

Administration of Justice

36. **Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to make the administration of justice in civil cases more efficient. [2872]

Mr. Streeter: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to his written question on 31 October, *Official Report*, column 222.

Public Record Office

37. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people visited the Public Record Office census rooms in 1995; and if he will make a statement. [2874]

Mr. Streeter: The number of reader visits to the census rooms in 1995 was 76,781.

The census rooms will remain open in the Chancery lane building until March 1997, when they will move to Myddelton place, 88 Roseberry avenue, London EC1. Their holdings will be supplemented with microfilms of other Public Record Office sources popular with family historians, including probate records and non-Anglican registers of births, marriages and deaths.

Myddelton place will also house the indexes of births, marriages and deaths currently made available to the public at St. Catherine's house by the Office for National Statistics. It will thus become a joint major centre for family historians and other researchers, within easy reach of central London repositories for related source materials.

Myddelton place will have improved facilities for users, including a central information point, shop, refreshment facilities, exhibition space, lecture room and better provision for readers with special needs, as well as search rooms.

Witness Intimidation

38. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what new proposals he has to counter witness intimidation. [2875]

Mr. Streeter: It is already an offence to intimidate witnesses. The Government are conducting a review into ways in which a defendant might be prevented from questioning rape victims and other vulnerable witnesses. There has recently been considerable work on victim and witness care: the Crown court witness service now operates in all Crown court centres, the new victims charter has been issued, and a national model agreement on witness care, including steps to combat intimidation, has been issued so that local agreements can be reached on the most appropriate steps.

Accident Claims

39. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will take steps to accelerate hearing dates in the High Court in relation to accident claims. [2876]

Mr. Streeter: The Department is currently taking forward reform of the civil justice system in the light of Lord Woolf's review and one of its aims is to bring cases to a conclusion more expeditiously. Pending implementation of the reforms, litigants or their representatives continue to be at liberty to apply to the court to accelerate the hearing of an accident claim, where appropriate.

Value for Money (Legal Profession)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what discussions he has had with the Bar Council and the Law Society on barristers and solicitors providing value for money. [4296]

Mr. Streeter: The legal profession is independent and self-regulating. Fee levels are, in privately funded matters, for client and lawyer to determine subject to the lawyer's professional rules and any particular controls provided by the courts, for example, taxation of costs. However, the Government are concerned to get value for money from publicly funded legal services. The legal aid rates paid to barristers and solicitors are considered each year in consultation with the Bar Council and the Law Society. The value for money provided by legal aid payments to barristers and solicitors is therefore considered on an annual basis, and is discussed with the profession with the same regularity.

EDS Ltd.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many contracts his Department, agencies and associated bodies have had with EDS for each year since 1985; what was the value of each contract; if he will indicate for each contract *(a)* if it was completed, *(b)* what modifications were made at the request of (i) the pany and (ii) the Department and *(c)* if work under contract is being undertaken in-house; and if he will make a statement on the number of job reductions in his Department arising from the contracting out of work by EDS. [3814]

Mr. Streeter: The chief executives of the Court Service, the Land Registry, the Public Record Office and the Public Trust Office will reply on behalf of their agencies. Prior to the establishment of the Court Service and the Public Trust Office as agencies, there is no record of any contracts with EDS. No contracts have been entered into with EDS subsequently by the remainder of the Department or its associated offices.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 18 November 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, has asked me to reply to the above Question about the contracts the Court Service has had with Electronic Data Systems Ltd (EDS).

Since the establishment of the Agency in April 1995, the Court Service has awarded two contracts to EDS. The first began in September 1996 and is for the provision of Information Services to county courts and Crown Court Centres in England and Wales and to the Bankruptcy and Companies Courts. EDS will be paid only for the volume of valid process produced (eg summonses in the county courts, petitions in the Bankruptcy Court) so the final cost is dependent on the Court Service's volume of business. However, the cost of providing the currently contracted IT services is expected to be between £20 million and £25 million (plus VAT) over 7 years. No modifications of the contract have yet been made.

The first module of the contract, to introduce a case management system into the county courts by the end of 1997, will save staff time equivalent to 600 full time posts.

Under a second contract EDS provided one day of consultancy support in October 1996 to the Management Structure Review Team in Court Service Headquarters. This consisted of technical advice (not available in-house) on identifying and weighting factors as part of formal decision-making. The work was not connected with the Information Services contract and was separately negotiated at a daily rate of £751. EDS completed the work, without modification and no job reductions arose from this contract.

Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 18 November 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary Question, listed on 8 November 1996, regarding contracts with EDS for each year since 1985.

The Public Trust Office has not awarded any contracts to EDS since 1985.

Letter from Stuart Hill to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 18 November 1996:

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question concerning contracts with EDS.

H M Land Registry has granted no contracts to this company.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 18 November 1996:

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply, for the Public Record Office, to your question about contracts with EDS.

The Public Record Office has had no contracts with EDS.

WALES

Tuberculosis

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many registered homeless have died from tuberculosis in Wales in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [1495]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not available centrally. Measures taken by the Department to combat tuberculosis were set out in my reply to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) on 7 November, *Official Report*, column *685*.

Higher Education

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of young people currently enter higher education; and what comparisons he has made with the numbers entering in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* each member of the European Union. [3039]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Information is available on a comparable basis for 1993 and is as follows:

Country of domicile	*Students entering higher education for the first time as a percentage of population*[1]
Wales	31.5
England	28.4
Scotland	35.4
GB	29.7

[1] Home domiciled students aged under 21 entering full-time higher education for the first time anywhere in Great Britain as a percentage of the average of the number of 18 and 19-year-olds in each home country.

Data are available for European Union countries on a slightly different basis for 1992 and are as follows:

Country	*Number of new entrants to full-time university education as a percentage of persons of starting age*
Belgium	27.3
Denmark	41.5
France	30.6
Germany (FTFR)	35.3
Germany	33.0
Greece	15.9
Ireland	22.1
Italy	41.3
Netherlands	40.1
Spain	43.3
United Kingdom	26.6

Source:
Education at a Glance OECD 1995.

Millennium Celebrations

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what events he plans to hold to draw support from the Welsh business community for the millennium celebrations. [3106]

Mr. Hague: In September, I attended a lunch for members of the Welsh business community. I am not aware of any further events at present.

Woodlands Projects

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what further support his Department proposes to promote existing projects currently experimenting with the integration of woodland-based manufacturing economies with an increase in the planting of deciduous woodland; and if he will make a statement on his assessment of the advantages of supporting existing projects; [3227]

(2) what research his Department has *(a)* planned, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* evaluated with regard to integrating proposals to increase deciduous woodland with the creation of woodland-based manufacturing economies; what financial commitment his Department has made in this area; and if he will make a statement. [3231]

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 13 November 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland.

Smallholdings

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assistance his Department gives to encourage smallholdings. [3453]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Welsh Office policies and support for agricultural businesses apply to smallholdings and larger business. In carrying out various programmes to improve the economic performance of the agriculture industry, full account is taken of the needs of small businesses. Small businesses also benefit from implementation of the Government's deregulation policies.

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what plans he has to assist children at risk in respect of difficulties after entry to school; [4201]

(2) what initiatives he has taken concerning policies for those with dyslexia at school. [4200]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The measures introduced by the Education Act 1993, now consolidated in part IV of the Education Act 1996, require schools to publish, and report on, policies for children with special educational needs, including those who are dyslexic, and to make appropriate provision. Schools, local education authorities and other agencies also have to have regard to the code of practice on the identification and assessment of special educational needs which contains guidance on the provision to be made for children with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia.

The Welsh Office makes funding available to local education authorities under the grants for education support and training programme for the training of teachers of children with special educational needs, including dyslexia.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to ensure that the problems and potential of dyslexic people are raised in the teacher training curriculum; and if he will make a statement. [4204]

Mr. Evans: The existing criteria for courses of initial teacher training set out the competences expected of newly qualified teachers with regard to the education of children with special educational needs, including dyslexia. There will be full consultation on the new ITT requirements in the new year.

Direct Labour Organisations

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list by authority and service area, the surplus achieved on trading accounts by local authorities' direct labour or services organisations in Wales for those services covered by the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 and the Local Government Act 1988 for the financial year 1994–95 in *(a)* cash and *(b)* constant prices; [4483]

(2) if he will list by authority and service area, the deficits of local authority direct labour or services organisations in Wales that have failed to meet the rate of return requirements for contracts under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 and the Local Government Act 1988 for the financial year 1994–95 in *(a)* cash and *(b)* constant prices. [4484]

Mr. Hague: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Arable Area Payments

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what area of land was set aside in Wales in 1995–96 under the arable area scheme. [4217]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: A total of 4,479.18 hectares.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many payments were made in Wales in 1995–96 under the arable area payments scheme *(a)* between £0 and £5,000, *(b)* £5,001 and £10,000, *(c)* £10,001 and £15,000, *(d)* £15,001 and £20,000, *(e)* £20,001 and £25,000, *(f)* £25,001 and £50,000, *(g)* £50,001 and £75,000, *(h)* £75,001 and £100,000, *(i)* £100,001 and £150,000, *(j)* £150,001 and £200,000, *(k)* £200,001 and £250,000 and *(l)* £250,001 and over. [4219]

Mr. Evans: The information is as follows:

Payment band	*Number of payments*
£0–£5,000	2,027
£5,001–£10,000	98
£10,001–£15,000	109
£15,001–£20,000	64
£20,001–£25,000	32
£25,001–£50,000	65
£50,001–£75,000	11
£75,001–£100,000	3
£100,001–£150,000	1

There were no payments above £150,000.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many payments were made in Wales in 1995–96 for set aside under the arable area scheme *(a)* between £0 and £5,000, *(b)* £5,001 and £10,000, *(c)* £10,001 and £15,000, *(d)* £15,001 and £20,000, *(e)* £20,001 and £25,000, *(f)* £25,001 and £50,000 and *(g)* over £50,001. [4218]

Mr. Evans: The information requested is as follows:

Payment band	*Number of payments*
£0–£5,000	345
£5,001–£10,000	44
£10,001–£15,000	10
£15,001–£20,000	1
£20,001–£25,000	1
£25,001–£50,000	1

There were no payments above £50,000.

Fire Authorities (Finance)

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the indicative contributions from the 22 constituent councils to their respective fire authorities. [3991]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is given in the following table:

Local authority contributions to fire authority budgets 1996–97

	£ thousand
Conwy	2,707
Denbighshire	2,233
Flintshire	3,553
Gwynedd	2,860
Isle of Anglesey	1,672
Wrexham	3,020
North Wales Fire Authority	16,045
Carmarthenshire	4,929
Ceredigion	2,033
Neath Port Talbot	4,085
Pembrokeshire	3,329
Powys	3,551
Swansea	6,734
Mid and West Wales Fire Authority	24,661
Blaenau Gwent	1,888
Bridgend	3,370
Caerphilly	4,405
Cardiff	7,895
Merthyr Tydfil	1,532
Monmouthshire	2,169
Newport	3,539
Rhondda Cynon Taff	6,156
Torfaen	2,332
The Vale of Glamorgan	3,063
South Wales Fire Authority	36,349
Wales	77,055

Source:
Local authority budget returns.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from local authorities in Wales on each of the three fire service budgets; and what has been his response to these representations. [3993]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I have responded to two representations from local authorities in Wales. The matter was also raised at the meeting of the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance on 23 September. The funding of fire brigades is the responsibility of their constituent local authorities. Provision for fire spending is included in the 1996–97 local authority revenue settlement which was approved by the House of Commons on 8 February.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he proposes to take in the event of one of the fire authorities failing to vote a supplementary levy in order to set a budget for the proper delivery of the fire services in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [3990]

Mr. Jones: Under the relevant legislation, this situation cannot arise. Each fire authority is required to set a budget which will enable its brigade to meet its statutory obligations under the Fire Services Act 1947 and to comply with the nationally recommended minimum standards of fire cover. In the case of combined fire authorities there is scope for the budget to be increased where circumstances warrant it.

Paragraph 21(5) of the South Wales Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order 1995 requires that payments made to the South Wales fire authority by its constituent local authorities

"shall be made at such times, and shall be of such amounts, as are at all times sufficient to enable the financial obligations of the Authority to be met."

Similar provisions are contained in the orders for the Mid and West Wales, and North Wales fire authorities.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the standard spending assessment figures for fire services in Wales prior to reorganisation and the figures for the aggregated budgets of the (i) North Wales, (ii) Mid and West Wales and (iii) South Wales fire services. [3992]

Mr. Jones: There were no standard spending assessments for fire brigades in Wales before reorganisation. Fire brigades were covered by the SSAs of the old counties.

The following table gives the 1995–96 fire brigade budgets of the old counties aggregated as closely as possible to the new combined fire authority areas. The only difference between these aggregated areas and the new fire authority areas is a small part of Clwyd which was transferred to Powys on 1 April 1996.

Local authority fire brigade budgets 1995–96

County area	*1995–96 budget £(000)*
Gwynedd/Clwyd	15,602
Dyfed/Powys/West Glamorgan	22,227
Mid Glamorgan/South Glamorgan/Gwent	34,187
Wales	72,016

Source:
Local authority returns.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 12 November, *Official Report*, column *210*, if he will publish the letter he received in favour of nursery vouchers in Wales. [4768]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My right hon. Friend is unable to publish unsolicited letters from members of the public, but the correspondent expressed strong support for the scheme and asked for her views, and those or others like her, to be represented.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Access Funds

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money has been made available for access funds in higher and further education in each year since they were introduced. [3585]

Mr. Ancram: The resources made available for access funds since their introduction in the academic year 1990–91 are as follows:

£ 000

Financial Year [1]	*Allocation*	
	Higher Education	*Further Education*
1990–91	348	144
1991–92	365	293
1992–93	369	297
1993–94	403	326
1994–95	443	394
1995–96	457	411
1996–97	458	411

[1] For higher education the financial year is August to July; for further education the Government financial year.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the adequacy of access funds in higher and further education. [3584]

Mr. Ancram: As part of the Government commitment to monitor student finance, a United Kingdom-wide student income and expenditure survey was carried out by the Policy Studies Institute during the 1995–96 academic year. This survey has included students in receipt of access funds. The findings will be published shortly.

"A Ray of Hope"

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the award of the UNESCO youth ambassador for the culture of peace to the choir, "A Ray of Hope"; and what assessment he has made of the contribution of the choir to the development of a more integrated society. [3436]

Mr. Ancram: The "Ray of Hope" choir is worthy of the warmest congratulations on winning the award of youth ambassador for the culture of peace. The children and teachers of the choir are fine examples of how mutual understanding among our young people can produce very positive results. By spreading the word of peace and reconciliation wherever they perform, they are making their own special contribution towards a more integrated society.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the private finance initiative projects in Northern Ireland which (i) are under construction, (ii) have been approved and (iii) are in the process of development. [3587]

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 7 November, *Official Report*, column *665*.

Smallholdings

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assistance his Department gives to encourage smallholdings. [3450]

Mr. Ancram: While there are no capital grant schemes specifically targeted to encourage smallholdings, grant assistance for all sizes of farm business is available under the sub-programme for agriculture and rural development—SPARD—capital grant and farm innovation schemes. Both of these are closed for receipt of applications at present.

The Department's agri-food development service runs a number of programmes, which include formal vocational courses and involve training courses and group activities at local community level in disadvantaged areas. These are of benefit to farms of all sizes, including small and very small holdings. Assistance for the establishment of farm woodlands is provided by the woodland grant scheme and the farm woodland premium scheme.

The Department has provided £900,000 of funding from the LEADER II programme to Family Farm Development Ltd. an organisation which aims to assist farm businesses.

Students

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many extra housing places for students have been created in the past 10 years; and what increase in student numbers there has been in further and higher education over the same years. [3583]

Mr. Ancram: A total of 1,741 extra housing spaces for students were created in the 10-year period 1 August 1986 to 31 July 1996.

In the same period, the number of full-time undergraduate students on higher education courses at Northern Ireland institutions increased from 15,274 to 27,134. The number of students on full-time further education courses increased from 15,178 to 21, 096.

Bovine Products Regulations

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce provisions to extend the Bovine Products (Despatch to other Member States) Regulations 1996 to Northern Ireland. [3667]

Mr. Ancram: It is planned to introduce before the end of 1996 Northern Ireland Bovine Products (Despatch to other Member States) Regulations similar to those introduced in Great Britain.

EDS Ltd.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many contracts his Department, agencies and associated bodies have had with EDS for each year since 1985; what was the value of each contract; if he will indicate for each contract *(a)* if it was completed, *(b)* what modifications were made at the request of (i) the company and (ii) the Department and *(c)* if work under contract is being undertaken in-house; and if he will make a statement on the number of job reductions in his Department arising from the contracting out of work by EDS. [3811]

Sir John Wheeler: The Northern Ireland Office, Northern Ireland departments and agencies have had one contract with EDS since 1985, which began in 1995. I am unable to disclose the value of this contract as that is covered by commercial confidentiality. The contract is not yet complete, no modifications have been made at the request of EDS or the Department, no work has been

undertaken in-house and no job reductions have taken place. To include information in respect of associated bodies would incur disproportionate cost.

Arable Area Payments

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what area of land was set-aside in Northern Ireland in 1995–96 under the arable area scheme. [4224]

Mr. Ancram: The total set-aside under the arable area payments scheme in Northern Ireland in 1995–96 was 1,726 hectares.

Health Services (Newry and Mourne)

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was *(a)* the total number of people in receipt of day care services, *(b)* the average number of day care service hours available to each recipient, *(c)* the total number of day care service hours available and *(d)* the total budget available for day care services for each year since 1990 in the Newry and Mourne district; and what are the projected figures in each case in each year to 2000. [3952]

Mr. Moss: The table shows the number of adults registered at statutory day care facilities within the Newry and Mourne health and social services trust area as at 31 March each year.

Year	*Number of adults*
1990	467
1991	621
1992	626
1993	599
1994	546
1995	522

Projected information is not held centrally. The average number of day care service hours available to each recipient and the total number of day care service hours available are not collected centrally.

The total budget available for each year, for which figures are available, was as follows:

Year	*Total expenditure*
1992–93	887,139
1993–94	1,195,286
1994–95	1,212,386
1995–96	1,241,136

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* social workers, *(b)* social work assistants, *(c)* residential care workers, *(d)* care assistants, *(e)* day care centre workers and *(f)* home helps were employed in the Newry and Mourne district in each year since 1990; and what are the projected figures for each year to 2000. [3949]

Mr. Moss: The table sets out the information for the Newry and Mourne trust area:

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Social workers	39	40	48	49	62	70
Social work assistants	19	21	23	25	27	28
Residential care workers	16	16	15	14	13	12
Care assistants	21	22	22	19	15	15
Day care centre workers	30	33	38	40	44	44
Home helps	922	820	791	1,288	763	718

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* district nurses, *(b)* nursing auxiliaries, *(c)* health visitors, *(d)* community midwives, *(e)* school nurses, *(f)* mental handicap nurses, *(g)* community psychiatric nurses, *(h)* treatment room nurses and *(i)* specialist nurses in (i) cancer care, (ii) diabetes, (iii) continence, (iv) family planning, (v) cardiac rehabilitation and (vi) stoma care were employed in the Newry and Mourne district in each year since 1990; and what are the projected figures for each category for each year to 2000. [3950]

Mr. Moss: The table sets out the information for the Newry and Mourne trust area:

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
District nurses	30	32	32	29	21	18
Nursing auxiliaries	70	79	76	77	82	96
Health visitors	29	29	30	32	30	24
Community midwives[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—
School nurses	6	6	5	5	5	5
Mental handicap nurses	3	5	6	7	7	6
Community psychiatric nurses	0	0	0	0	13	14
Treatment room nurses[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cancer care specialist nurses[3]	0	0	1	1	1	2
Family planning specialist nurses	0	0	0	0	0	0

[1] Not separately identifiable from district nurses.

[2] Not available centrally.

[3] Macmillan nurses only.

Numbers of specialist nurses for diabetes, continence, cardiac rehabilitation and stoma care is not available centrally.

Information on projected staffing levels for future years is not held.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was *(a)* the total number of people in receipt of home help care, *(b)* the average number of home help hours available to each recipient, *(c)* the total number of home help hours available and *(d)* the total budget available for home help services for each year since 1990 in the Newry and Mourne district; and what are the projected figures for each year to 2000. [3953]

Mr. Moss: The table shows the number of people in receipt of home help service in the Newry and Mourne health and social services trust area as at 31 March each year. Reliable information on the number of home help hours worked is not available centrally.

1990: 1,514

1991: 1,578

1992: 1,495

1993: 1,795

1994: 1,744

1995: 1,687

1996: 1,939

Total expenditure on home help services for each year was as follows:

Year	*Total expenditure*
1991	2,053,404
1991–92	2,182,948
1992–93	2,340,023
1993–94	2,511,333
1994–95	2,753,428
1995–96	2,525,562

Projected figures are not available centrally.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the social work case load in the Newry and Mourne district in each year since 1990; and what are the projected figures for each year to 2000. [3954]

Mr. Moss: The table shows the number of people who have been in contact with the social services department of the Newry and Mourne health and social services trust area during year ended 31 March:

1990: 1,344

1991: 2,025

1992: 4,736

1993: 5,436

1994: 4,958

1995: 6,173

Projected figures are not available centrally.

Note:

The 1990 figure excludes elderly people and physically disabled people who were in contact with the trust.

The 1991 figure excludes elderly people who were in contact with the trust.

The 1994 figure includes estimated data for the number of mentally ill people who were in contact with the trust.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total number of attendances at psychiatric day hospitals in Newry and Mourne district in each year since 1990; and what are the projected figures for each year to 2000. [3955]

Mr. Moss: There are no psychiatric day hospitals in Newry and Mourne health and social services trust.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total number of psychiatric out-patient attendances in the Newry and Mourne district in each year since 1990; and what are the projected figures for each year to 2000. [3956]

Mr. Moss: The table shows the number of attendances at psychiatric consultant out-patient clinics in the Newry and Mourne health and social services trust.

1989–90: 1,560

1990–91: 1,544

1991–92: 1,536

1992–93: 0

1993–94: 0

1994–95: 4,196

1995–96: 3,819

Note:

During the years 1992–93 and 1993–94, there were no psychiatric out-patient clinics in the Newry and Mourne health and social services trust area. Services in these years were provided elsewhere.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total number of face-to-face contacts with community psychiatric nurses in the Newry and Mourne district in each year since 1990; and what are the projected figures for each year to 2000. [3959]

Mr. Moss: The table shows the number of face-to-face contacts with community psychiatric nurses in the Newry and Mourne health and social services trust. Information for individual trusts is not available prior to 1994–95.

1994–95: 8,053

1995–96: 9,087

Projected information is not available centrally.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total number of patients treated in the Newry and Mourne district in each year since 1990 broken down by *(a)* general surgery, *(b)* ear, nose and throat, *(c)* general medicine, *(d)* cardiac medicine, *(e)* gynaecology, *(f)* obstetrics, *(g)* paediatrics, *(h)* psychiatry, *(i)* ophthalmology, *(j)* dermatology, (k) oral surgery, (l) thoracic surgery, (m) haematology and (n) accident and emergency; and what are the projected figures for each year to 2000. [3961]

Mr. Moss: The table shows the number of patients treated and the number of attendances as consultant out-patient clinics and accident and emergency departments in the Newry and Mourne HSS trust for the financial years 1989–90 to 1995–96. Projected figures are not available centrally.

		1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96
General surgery	Inpatients	4,135	4,130	4,114	4,615	5,020	5,291	5,709
	Outpatient attendances	12,623	11,692	13,270	13,852	14,025	14,291	15,435
ENT	Inpatients	722	751	786	768	767	812	805
	Outpatient attendances	2,047	2,243	2,184	2,048	1,999	2,193	2,128
General medicine	Inpatients	1,865	2,106	2,076	2,223	2,680	2,834	2,856
	Outpatient attendances	6,370	6,378	6,310	6,213	6,504	6,834	7,283
Cardiology	Inpatients	549	545	832	932	884	928	828
	Outpatient attendances	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gynaecology	Inpatients	1,488	1,672	1,686	1,924	2,060	1,885	1,856
	Outpatient attendances	3,781	3,928	3,670	4,049	4,976	5,363	6,135
Obstetrics	Inpatients	2,478	2,419	2,164	2,358	2,263	2,404	2,236
	Outpatient attendances	6,382	7,011	6,310	6,785	6,784	6,665	6,989
Paediatrics	Inpatients	1,038	986	1,096	1,063	1,161	1,230	1,345
	Outpatient attendances	3,198	2,998	2,851	3,209	3,399	3,444	3,759
Mental illness	Inpatients	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Outpatient attendances	1,560	1,544	1,536	0	0	4,196	3,819
Ophthalmology	Inpatients	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Outpatient attendances	3,320	3,092	3,298	3,780	4,084	4,125	4,360
Dermatology	Inpatients	0	0	0	0	89	223	0
	Outpatient attendances	2,668	2,769	2,178	3,355	3,385	3,950	4,327
Oral surgery	Inpatients	48	29	27	15	72	71	76
	Outpatient attendances	376	366	442	617	712	724	786
Thoracic surgery	Inpatients	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Outpatient attendances	29	63	78	73	71	104	131
Haematology	Inpatients	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Outpatient attendances	0	0	66	105	96	148	155
Accident and emergency departments		29,556	29,984	28,452	30,081	29,436	30,410	32,355

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total number of *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses, *(c)* paramedical staff, broken down by discipline and *(d)* other employees employed to deliver health services in the Newry and Mourne district in each year since 1990; and what are the projected figures for each year to 2000. [3963]

Mr. Moss: The table sets out the information for the Newry and Mourne trust area.

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Doctors	43	44	43	51	73	85
Nurses	563	597	595	586	605	621
Chiropodists	7	6	6	6	7	9
Dietitians	2	3	2	2	3	2
Occupational therapists	11	12	13	12	17	18
Orthoptists	0	0	0	0	0	0
Physiotherapists	19	21	22	21	20	22
Speech and language therapists	6	6	7	6	7	8
Clinical psychologists	0	0	0	0	0	3
Other	806	784	820	778	803	834

Information on projected staffing levels for future years is not held.

Daisy Hill Hospital

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of *(a)* the clinical effectiveness and *(b)* the cost-effectiveness of Daisy Hill hospital; and what plans he has to safeguard the future of the hospital. [3951]

Mr. Moss: Assessments of the clinical effectiveness and the cost effectiveness of Daisy Hill hospital are a matter for Newry and Mourne HSS trust and its purchasers in the first instance. The future role of the hospital will be shaped by the requirements of my Department's regional strategy for health and social well-being 1997 to 2000, taking account of local needs.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the average number of beds available in each ward at Daisy Hill hospital in each year since 1990; and what are the projected figures for each ward for each year to 2000. [3965]

Mr. Moss: The table shows the average number of available beds in wards open overnight in the Daisy Hill hospital for the financial years 1989–90 to 1995–6. Projected bed figures are not available.

Ward classification	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
General patients—children	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
General patients—elderly	36	43	43	43	44	44	44
General patients—other	180	171	166	164	156	151	150
Neonates—maternity	40	40	40	40	40	49	40
Maternity—consultant	52	52	52	52	46	38	38

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the average waiting period for appointments with *(a)* resident consultants and *(b)* non-resident consultants at Daisy Hill hospital, for each discipline, in each year since 1990; and what are the projected figures for each year to 2000. [3960]

Mr. Moss: Information is not available in the format requested. The table shows the number of people who had their first out-patient appointment in the Newry and Mourne HSS trust during the years 1993–94 and 1995–96 and the length of time they waited. Information before 1993–94 and projected figures are not available centrally.

Waiting time in months

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
0 to 2	9,591	10,513	12,160
3 to 5	2,070	1,185	1,737
6 to 8	208	114	181
9 to 11	66	7	43
12 to 14	4	1	1
15 to 17	1	0	1
18 to 20	1	1	0
21 to 23	1	0	0
24+	1	1	0
Total	11,943	11,822	14,123

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the average number of nurses employed by Daisy Hill hospital in each year since 1990; and what are the projected figures for each year to 2000. [3969]

Mr. Moss: The number of nurses employed in Daisy Hill hospital was as follows:

Year (at 31 December[1])	*Nurses*
1990	296
1991	319
1992	315
1993	312
1994	319
1995	332

[1] Average number of nurses in each year is not available.

Information on projected staffing levels for future years is not held.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the average number of employees at Daisy Hill hospital in each year since 1990; and what are the projected figures for each year to 2000. [3964]

Mr. Moss: The number of employees in Daisy Hill hospital was as follows:

Year (at 31 December[1])	*Total employees*
1990	667
1991	685
1992	690
1993	662
1994	694
1995	732

[1] Average number of employees in each year is not available.

Information on projected staffing levels for future years is not held.

Waiting Times

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the average waiting periods experienced by *(a)* patients whose services are purchased by their local health board and *(b)* patients of GP fundholders. [3957]

Mr. Moss: The table shows the number of people admitted as in-patients during the period 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996 and the length of time they had waited. The average waiting time is not calculable because information on patient waiting times is grouped into time bands and is not measured individually.

Waiting time in months	Purchaser: Eastern board	Northern board	Southern board	Western board	GP fundholders
0 to 2	31,581	19,077	20,690	12,347	21,315
3 to 5	4,847	3,301	2,332	1,543	3,970
6 to 8	2,242	1,204	871	562	1,641
9 to 11	1,460	695	475	379	960
12 to 14	746	435	305	240	440
15 to 17	394	136	107	56	180
18 to 20	177	61	55	43	68
21 to 23	61	31	28	17	30
24+	147	61	69	39	74
No date decided to admit recorded	4,394	1,461	929	375	1,679
Total	46,049	26,162	25,861	15,601	30,357

You will also be interested to know that waiting lists and waiting times generally have been reduced considerably since 1992. For example, in that year, about 3,000 patients were waiting two years or more for admission. In March this year virtually nobody was waiting more than two years while there were 800 waiting more than 18 months. The number of patients treated has risen continually over the same period from a total number of 330,000—ordinary admissions and day cases—in 1991–92 to 400,000 approximately in 1995–96.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the average waiting periods experienced by *(a)* patients whose services are purchased by each of the health boards and *(b)* patients of general practitioner fundholders for (i) Northern Ireland, (ii) each health board area and (iii) each hospital trust area. [3958]

Mr. Moss: The tables show the number of people admitted as in-patients during the period 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996 in Northern Ireland and how long they had waited. The average waiting time is not calculable because information on patient waiting times is grouped in time bands and is measured individually.

(a) Patients of health and social services boards

Waiting time in months	Northern Ireland	Purchaser: EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB
0 to 2	83,695	31,581	19,077	20,690	12,347
3 to 5	12,023	4,847	3,301	2,332	1,543
6 to 8	4,879	2,242	1,204	871	562
9 to 11	3,009	1,460	695	475	379
12 to 14	1,726	746	435	305	240
15 to 17	693	394	136	107	56
18 to 20	336	177	61	55	43
21 to 23	137	61	31	28	17
24+	316	147	61	69	39
No date decided to admit recorded	7,159	4,394	1,461	929	375
Total	113,973	46,049	26,462	25,861	15,061

Hospitals trusts do not have a designated geographical area and therefore the information is not available.

(b) Patients of general practitioner fundholders

Waiting time in months	Purchaser: Northern Ireland
0 to 2	21,315
3 to 5	3,970
6 to 8	1,641
9 to 11	960
12 to 14	440
15 to 17	180
18 to 20	68
21 to 23	30
24+	74
No date decided to admit recorded	1,679
Total	30,357

BSE

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what percentage and what total amount of BSE eradication and compensation scheme expenditure has been received by *(a)* farmers, *(b)* slaughterers, *(c)* renderers and *(d)* other recipients; and if he will make a statement; [2160]

(2) what has been the total expenditure to date on the BSE eradication and compensation schemes; and if he will make a statement. [2165]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 6 November 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 6 November, *Official Report,* column *582,* by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Fireworks

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the importation of illegal fireworks into Northern Ireland in the last three years; what seizures have been made; what categories of illegal fireworks have been found; and what was the country of manufacture. [2494]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* The Chief Constable has advised me that police made 93 seizures in 1994, 31 in 1995, and that 100 seizures have been made so far this year. Illegal fireworks recovered were from categories 1 (indoor), 2 (garden) and 3 (display) and had been manufactured in China, France, Germany or Austria.

Quantities of illegal fireworks seized in 1996 have amounted to approximately 34 tonnes, a considerable increase on the 1 to 2 tonnes of previous years.

My officials, in consultation with the RUC and others, will be considering what lessons are to be learnt from this year's experience.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the latest estimates of the expenditure on external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in

1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [4064]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 14 November 1996]:* Within the Northern Ireland departments and their agencies, expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992 in 1996 prices is:

1992–93: £22,097,000

1993–94: £31,889,000

1994–95: £26,462,000

1995–96: £25,543,000

As consultants are, in many instances, engaged to contribute particular skills to an element of much larger process, it is not possible to quantify savings which such expenditure has resulted in but, in each instance, consultants were engaged on the basis of best value for money.

Figures for the Northern Ireland Office are not currently available. I shall write to the hon. Member in due course.

Taxation

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* individuals and *(b)* trusts paid capital gains tax in Northern Ireland in the last year for which figures are available. [3941]

Mr. Jack: I have been asked to reply.

I regret that separate figures for Northern Ireland are not available.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money was received by the Treasury from *(a)* capital gains tax and *(b)* inheritance tax in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years. [3942]

Mr. Jack: I have been asked to reply.

Receipts of capital gains tax in the United Kingdom are published in table 1.2 of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1996". I regret that separate figures for Northern Ireland are not available. Receipts of inheritance tax—including capital transfer tax and estate duty—in Northern Ireland for each of the last 10 years are in the table.

Year	*Receipts £ million*
1986–87	12.4
1987–88	16.5
1988–89	11.0
1989–90	11.0
1990–91	17.1
1991–92	13.4
1992–93	13.7
1993–94	11.5
1994–95	14.8
1995–96	14.8

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of estates granted probate in the last year in Northern Ireland paid inheritance tax. [3940]

Mr. Jack: I have been asked to reply.

It is estimated that in 1995–96 about 4 per cent. of estates for which a grant of representation—or probate—was obtained in Northern Ireland were liable to inheritance tax.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Mammalian Meat and Bonemeal

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what data he collated on the movement of mammalian meat and bonemeal from 12 July 1995 to 12 July 1996; and if he will make a statement; [1359]

(2) what data he collated on the movement of mammalian meat and bonemeal from 12 July to 1 August; and if he will make a statement; [1355]

(3) what data he has collated on the movement of mammalian meat and bonemeal since 1 August 1996; and if he will make a statement. [1360]

Mrs. Browning: Mammalian meat and bonemeal derived from specified bovine material is audited by the State Veterinary Service. No data were collated on the movement of this material during the periods in question which, under the Specified Bovine Materials Order 1996—formerly the Specified Bovine Offals Order 1995—is required to be incinerated or landfilled following production in approved plants. With the introduction of the over-30-months scheme, the Specified Bovine Material Order was amended to allow OTMS carcasses to be processed in SBM rendering lines. As Commission regulation 716/96 requires rendered OTMS material to be destroyed, all of the MBM now produced from these lines is being stored by the Intervention Board pending disposal by the best practicable environmental option. Data collated on the movement of MBM into store during the periods in question are as follows:

	Tonnes
3 May 1996–12 July 1996	7,201
13 July 1996–31 July 1996	15,184
1 August 1996–31 October 1996	67,682

MBM derived from other animal waste is rendered separately in dedicated rendering lines under GB provisions set out in the Animal By-Products Order 1992, as amended. Its production is also audited by the State Veterinary Service. Following the ban on feeding mammalian MBM to all farm animals with effect from 4 April 1996, a proportion of the MBM from this waste stream has been sent by renderers to landfill sites. Some data were collated on the quantities of MBM sent for landfill during part of the periods in question, but these are incomplete and considered unreliable.

Data collated on mammalian MBM, and animal feed containing this, moved under the Government's feed recall scheme during the periods in question is as follows:

	Tonnes
12 July 1995–12 July 1996	6,863
13 July 1996–31 July 1996	4,040
1 August 1996–31 October 1996	4

Arable Area Payments

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was (i) the maximum, (ii) the minimum and (iii) the average payment made under the arable area payments scheme in 1995. [3633]

Mr. Baldry: In the 1995 scheme year, the highest payment under the arable area payments scheme in England was for £2,040,092.26. The smallest payment that could be claimed in 1995 was £80.75, but some claimants may have received less than this because of the application of administrative penalties under the scheme. The average total payment per claim was £24,296.

Renderers and Abattoirs (Prosecutions)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all completed prosecutions initiated by local authority departments against *(a)* renderers, *(b)* abattoirs, *(c)* livestock dealers, *(d)* animal feed manufacturers and *(e)* pet food manufacturers for each year since 1990, stating for each the (i) date, (ii) name of the individual or organisation prosecuted, (iii) nature of the charges and (iv) outcome of the prosecution; and if he will make a statement. [3662]

Mrs. Browning: Information on prosecutions conducted by local authorities is not held centrally by this Department. To gather the material together over this period of time would involve disproportionate costs.

Public Interest Immunity

Ms Quin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what public interest immunity certificates his Department has issued since November 1995. [3713]

Mr. Boswell: The Minister has not issued any public interest immunity certificates since November 1995.

Milk (Dioxins)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library the complete data arising from the survey of dioxins in milk at industrial sites which were summarised in the MAFF–Department of Health information bulletin published on 31 October. [3916]

Mrs. Browning: The article in the bulletin reported the interim results of the survey. The Ministry did not intend to publish details of the interim results until the survey was completed. However, in this case I will arrange for the data to be placed in the Library once they have been compiled into a suitable form.

Industrial Fishing

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to promote measures in respect of industrial fishing through the European Council of Ministers. [4161]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 15 November 1996]:* In the Fisheries Council I have called for more collaborative research in order to increase our understanding of the impact of industrial fisheries on other species, I have successfully pressed for measures to reduce herring mortality in industrial fisheries in line with advice received from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, I have urged the need for the next multi-annual guidance programme to deal adequately with the industrial fisheries fleet and I am supporting tighter by-catch rules in the sandeel fishery as part of new technical conservation measures.

Soya Beans

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what applications have been made for licences for the importation of genetically engineered soya beans; and if he will make a statement. [4268]

Mrs. Browning: A marketing consent for a specified type of genetically modified soya bean was granted in May 1996 under the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1992, as amended.

Quarantine

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 5 November, *Official Report*, column *488*, on quarantine regulations, when he expects to make a decision on this matter. [4466]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 15 November 1996]:* At this stage it is not possible to give a date.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of appeals against the disallowance of incapacity benefit for the last financial year were successful; and if he will make a statement. [734]

Mr. Burt: Between 1 June 1995 and 31 March 1996, 45 per cent. of appeals against disallowance of incapacity benefit were decided in favour of the appellant.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in Scotland are currently awaiting a hearing for an appeal against an all work test refusal *(a)* in total and *(b)* for each benefit office in Scotland; what percentage this represents of total tests at each office; what is the current average waiting time before each appeal is heard; and what action he is taking to expedite appeals. [1358]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

There are 4,423 appeals against incapacity benefit all-work test decisions currently outstanding in Scotland. Individual totals for each office are shown in the table.

The current average waiting time before each appeal is heard in Scotland is 19.22 weeks.

We recently introduced regulations amending the appeals process which should help to reduce the time it takes to clear appeals. The Independent tribunal service, through its change programme, continue to look for ways to improve clearance times.

Benefits agency office	*Outstanding appeals (held by the Independent Tribunal Service as at 5 November 1996)*	*All-work test decisions made during the quarter 1 April to 30 June 1996*
Greenock	150	794
Glasgow City	44	309
Glasgow Maryhill	33	321
Glasgow Shettleston	300	632
Glasgow Provan	3	702
Glasgow South West		1,248
Glasgow Bridgeton	491	293
Glasgow Laurieston	4	704
East Kilbride	301	529
Glasgow Anniesland	195	718
Glasgow Partick	1	475
Irvine	65	751
Kilmarnock	101	375
Clydebank	115	1,267
Campbeltown	12	102
Oban	9	48
Renfrew	101	1,301
Ayr	220	1,245
Dumfries	37	477
Stranraer	18	204
Glasgow Springburn	196	926
Cumbernauld	199	1,199
Motherwell	595	1,095
Hamilton		857
Coatbridge	56	636
Edinburgh South	37	829
Edinburgh East	25	782
Galashiels	25	236
Kirkcaldy	2	332
Cowdenbeath	141	513
Dunfermline		672
Leven		376
Stirling	68	711
Falkirk	150	1,437
Aberdeen	2	869
Lerwick	4	39
Peterhead	55	560
Inverness	29	481
Fort William	1	113
Kirkwall	0	50
Wick	4	184
Edinburgh City	32	424
Leith	14	586
Lothian West	92	2,033
Dundee	463	1,602
Arbroath		457
Perth		468
Elgin	29	337
Stornaway	4	149

Source:

100 per cent. count of the incapacity benefit system excluding a small number of clerically processed cases. Some credits only cases which existed prior to April 1995 are not included either.

Notes:

1. The number of decisions made includes a small number of credits only cases disallowed as customers failed to return their questionnaire without good cause or failed to attend a medical examination.

2. Some severe disablement allowance cases which were allowed following reference to Benefits Agency Medical Services are included in the decisions.

3. The decision to withdraw benefit is made by the independent adjudication officer.

Bronchitis and Emphysema

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to introduce revised criteria in respect of the claims for disablement benefit in respect of chronic bronchitis and emphysema. [2041]

Mr. Roger Evans: A response to the industrial injuries advisory committee's report on chronic bronchitis and emphysema will be made shortly.

Private Pension Schemes

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the average percentage of total costs taken up on entering private pension schemes by *(a)* fees, charges and administration and *(b)* occupational and private pension rebates and subsidies (i) in the first year and (ii) at retirement age, for men and women now aged (1) 20, (2) 30, (3) 40 and (4) 50 years. [3047]

Mr. Heald: No such estimates have been undertaken. Given the variety and diversity of occupational and personal pension provision in the United Kingdom, establishing the average percentage of total charges is not possible.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the percentage of total pension payments dependent on the performance of private pension funds *(a)* currently, *(b)* in 2010 and *(c)* in 2020. [3923]

Mr. Heald: It is estimated that in 1994, the latest year for which figures are available, approximately 40 per cent. of total pension payments, including the state retirement and earnings-related pensions, were from funded occupational and personal pension schemes.

Comparable projections for 2010 and 2020 are not available.

Old Age Pensions (Budget)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current budget for old—age pensions in England and Wales; and what it was in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1990 in equivalent terms. [3092]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

£ million (GB)

	1979–80	*1990–91*	*1996–97*
Cash price			
Cash price contributory retirement pension	8,816	22,699	31,951
Non-contributory retirement pension	36	36	36
Total retirement pension	8,852	22,735	31,987
1996–97 prices			
Contributory retirement pension	23,260	27,782	31,951
Non-contributory retirement pension	95	44	36
Total retirement pension	22,355	27,826	31,987

Source:

Social Security March 1996 departmental report and earlier equivalents.

Income Support

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners receiving income support as an addition to their income would not be eligible for such support if the basic retirement pension had been increased annually in accordance with earnings since 1980; and what percentage of basic retirement pensioners received supplementary benefit income support in (i) 1979 and (ii) 1995. [3050]

Mr. Heald: It is estimated that some 830,000 benefit units would no longer be eligible for income support in addition to retirement pension if the retirement pension had been increased annually in accordance with earnings since 1980[1]. The estimate increases to 850,000 benefit units if RP had continued to be increased in accordance with the higher of earnings or prices since 1980.

It is estimated that around 22 per cent. of basic retirement pensioners were in benefit units in receipt of supplementary benefit in 1979. The equivalent figure in 1995 for income support is 15 per cent[2].

Note:

Benefit units may be a single person or a couple, plus any dependent children. Either the claimant, their partner, or both claimant and partner may be in receipt of retirement pension.

Sources:

1. Income support simulation model based on the Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry May 1995 uprated to 1996–7 prices and caseloads. Estimate rounded to the nearest 10,000.

2. Data from the Supplementary Benefit Statistics Annual Enquiry 1979, Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry November 1995, retirement pension statistics November 1979 and September 1995. The estimate is rounded to nearest whole number.

National Insurance

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on present national insurance contribution rates for employees and employers, what would be the excess of contribution income over benefits, applying the standard assumptions of the Government Actuary, in the years (i) 2000-01, (ii) 2010-11, (iii) 2020-21 and (iv) 2030-31; and what would be the excess in each case if the rate of unemployment was assumed to be *(a)* 3 per cent. and *(b)* 8 per cent. [3051]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table. However, I refer the hon. Member to table 10 of HC 160 which reflects the Government Actuary's estimate of the effect on contribution rates of a 2 per cent. change in the unemployment assumption.

Information based on assumed unemployment rates of 3 and 8 per cent. could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

National insurance fund: £ billion at 1994–95 prices using 1995–96 contribution rates

	2000–01	*2010–11*	*2020–21*	*2030–31*
Excess of contribution income over benefit expenditure[1]	1.94	2.90	5.54	3.97

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Notes:

[1] Net of costs of administration but excluding any Treasury grant and investment income.

1. The information in the table is based upon the future rate of unemployment—5 per cent.—assumed for the purposes of the Government Actuary's report on the third quinquennial review under section 137 of the Social Security Act 1975 (HC 160).

Disability Living Allowance

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* first applications for disability living allowance were refused, *(b)* appeals against the decision to refuse disability living allowance were made and *(c)* appeals for disability living allowance were successful in (i) 1994–95 and (ii) 1995–96. [3508]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested as disability living allowance statistics do not distinguish between reviews and appeals for first claims, and reviews and appeals of existing awards. A claim may be successful on review or appeal for a variety of reasons, for example, because additional information has been received or the claimant's condition has deteriorated. Such information as is available is in the table.

Thousands

Refusals, reviews and appeals[1]	*Numbers*
1994–95	
First applications refused	256
Review decisions[2]	317
Successful reviews[3]	154
Appeal decisions[4]	26
Successful appeals[5]	17

Refusals, reviews and appeals[1]	*Thousands* *Numbers*
1995–96	
First application refused	225
Review decisions[2]	333
Successful reviews[3]	147
Appeal decisions[4]	28
Successful appeals[5]	18

Source:

Analytical Services Division: figures based on 100 per cent. data have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

Notes:

[1] Reviews and appeals may be received in one year but decided in a later year.

[2] Includes both reviews of the first applications which were refused and reviews of existing awards.

[3] Includes both successful reviews of first applications which were refused and existing awards where the award was increased.

[4] Includes both decisions about first applications which were refused after review and decisions about existing awards.

[5] Includes both first awards of the benefit and existing awards where the award was increased.

Appeals

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals his Department has to reduce the time taken over social security appeals. [2867]

Mr. Roger Evans: We recently introduced regulations amending the appeals process which should help to reduce the time it takes to clear appeals. The independent tribunal service, through its change programme, continues to look for ways to improve clearance times.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many claimants possessing documentary evidence of being awarded reduced earnings allowance for life have presented their evidence to the Benefits Agency; how many of these have been compensated; and at what estimated cost to his Department; [4091]

(2) when the *(a)* investigation and *(b)* compensation processes into claimants possessing documentary evidence of being awarded reduced earnings allowance for life commenced; and when he expects that they will be completed. [4090]

Mr. Roger Evans: To receive compensation a person must be able to show a financial loss because a commitment was undertaken in reliance on an unconditional official assurance that reduced earnings allowance would continue in payment for life or some other period.

Awards of reduced earnings allowance, for whatever period, are always made subject to the requirements for entitlement continuing to be satisfied. For those over pension age, the condition is that the recipient continues in regular employment or can be treated by regulations as continuing in regular employment. No-one awarded reduced earnings allowance since April 1989 should have been given an unconditional assurance of future payment. I am aware that some such assurances may have been given and that the Benefits Agency is considering claims for compensation from people transferred from reduced earnings allowance to retirement allowance as they arise. To date, none of the four claims considered has satisfied the criteria for payment.

War Pensions

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the extra cost to his Department if a national disregard of war pensions were applied by each local authority in England for the purpose of *(a)* council tax and *(b)* housing benefit. [4297]

Mr. Roger Evans: Any increase in the mandatory disregards of war pensions in the income-related benefits would apply across all of Great Britain.

It is broadly estimated that the additional cost of a total disregard of all war pensions is *(a)* £15 million for council tax benefit; and *(b)* £45 million for housing benefit.[1]

Any increase in these mandatory disregards would also have to apply in the calculation of the other income-related benefits, notably income support. It is estimated that a total disregard of all war pensions for income support purposes would cost around a further £35 million in additional benefit expenditure.

Thus, when these costs are added to the £25 million cost of the present mandatory disregards, it can be seen that, for all the income-related benefits, the estimated overall cost of a mandatory total disregard would be in the region of £120 million. This would be in addition to the estimated £1.4 billion expenditure on war pensions for 1996–97.

Notes:

[1] Estimates are based upon data given in Local Authority subsidy returns for 1994–95; the May 1994 Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry; and the 1991, 1992 and 1993 Family Expenditure Surveys.

The estimates have been uprated to 1996–97 levels.

In compiling these estimates, expenditure has been rounded, where appropriate, to the nearest £5 million.

Estimates are broad order estimates only, due to a lack of comprehensive data.

Pensioners (Benefits)

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average cost per head to public funds in respect of social security payments over and above the standard retirement or widow's pension of *(a)* retirement pensioners generally and *(b)* retirement pensioners in the last two years of their lives. [4379]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

The cost of social security on the elderly per elderly person per week is £14.

Notes:

Figure rounded to the nearest £1.

Sources:

1. Departmental Report March 1996—the figures used are for benefit expenditure on Elderly people i.e. those aged 60 or over excluding retirement pension—basic element and earning related component.

2. Population estimates unit, Office of National Statistics.

Pensioners Living Abroad

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many British pensioners qualified for a state retirement pension in those countries where the pension is frozen at *(a)* the most recent date for which figures are available and *(b)* a year previously; and what factors underlie the increase over that period of his estimate of the payment of fully indexed pensions. [4382]

Mr. Heald: In July 1996, the most recent date for which figures are available, United Kingdom state retirement and widow's pensions were paid to 429,647 beneficiaries in countries where the pensions are frozen. Corresponding figures for July 1995 are not available. In January 1995, such pensions were paid to 400,742 beneficiaries. The increase over the period January 1995 to July 1996 in the cost of extending annual cost of living increases to beneficiaries whose pensions are frozen is attributable to *(a)* the rise in the number of pensioners in receipt of frozen pensions and *(b)* the increase in benefit rates by 2.2 per cent. in April 1995 and 3.9 per cent. in April 1996.

Contributions Holidays

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for national insurance contributions holidays have been received since April 1995; how many have been successful by standard region and Great Britain as a whole and by *(a)* gender and *(b)* ethnicity and specifying the numbers who were (i) registered unemployed, (ii) recipients of a training allowance, (iii) lone parents and (iv) carers. [4434]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

	Number
Applications	2,039
Successful applications	1,679
Unsuccessful applications	279
Awaiting further information	81

Regional breakdown (successful applications)

	Number
North	188
Yorkshire and Humberside	254
East Midlands	174
East Anglia	56
South East	233
South West	162
West Midlands	174
North West	166
Wales	80
Scotland	142
Greater London	50

Total successful applications, by gender

	Number
Male	1,435
Female	244

Number previously unemployed: 1,619. Number of lone parents: 57.

Number of carers: 3.

1. The number of recipients of training allowance is not calculated separately.

2. Statistics relate to the position on 13 November 1996.

Housing and Council Tax Benefit

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications have been made for extended payment of housing benefit and council tax benefit and how many have been successful by standard region and Great Britain as a whole and by *(a)* gender and *(b)* ethnicity, specifying the numbers who were (i) registered unemployed, (ii) recipients of a training allowance, (iii) lone parents and (iv) carers and the duration of the benefit claim since the inception of the scheme. [4435]

Mr. Roger Evans: Information concerning the gender, ethnicity and duration of claim in respect of housing benefit and council tax benefit extended payments is not collected. The remaining information will be available early next year.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 11 November, *Official Report*, column 97, if he will calculate the equivalent figures on social security and welfare services in the same form as the Eurostat publication for the period 1994–95. [4546]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table; only Denmark, Italy and the UK have supplied Eurostat with information for 1994 calculated in this way. The equivalent figures for 1994–95 for the United Kingdom could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Country	*General Government expenditure on social security and welfare services as percentage of gross domestic product*
Denmark	27.71
Italy	18.32
United Kingdom	16.61

1. Figures are for 1994. 2. The figures shown in the Eurostat publication "General Government accounts and statistics" for Social Security and welfare services include:

Social security and assistance

Administration of payments and funds to compensate for loss of income due to accident, injury, sickness and unemployment and old age pensions.

Allowances for families, guardians' and widows' allowances, public relief and war veterans' benefits.

Welfare services

Child welfare services and institutions.

Homes for, and care of, the aged and disabled.

Family welfare agencies and services.

Other special welfare institutions and organisations.

They do not include "Health affairs and services" as well as some other smaller items which are included in Eurostat social protection totals.

Benefit Take-up Rates

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the next edition of "Income-related Benefits: Estimates of Take-up", will be published. [5065]

Mr. Roger Evans: "Income-related Benefits: Estimates of Take-up in 1994–95" have been published today by the Government statistical service. Copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Benefits Agency (Seaham and Peterlee)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the future of the Seaham and Peterlee Benefits Agency offices; and what changes in provision of services have taken place in the previous 12 months in respect of these offices. [3389]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John Cummings, dated 15 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will make a statement on the future of the Seaham and Peterlee Benefits Agency offices; and what changes in provision of services have taken place in the previous 12 months in respect of these offices.

As with other Districts, North Durham District, which includes the offices at Peterlee and Seaham, is required to review the services it provides to ensure that the most effective service is given within the resources available. There are no current plans to close either Peterlee or Seaham offices.

Management responsibility for Seaham Branch Office will transfer from North Durham District to Wearside District with effect from 1st April 1997. It is proposed that a number of claims processing staff will transfer from Seaham Branch Office to the new purpose-built Sunderland District Office. The service to customers at Seaham Branch Office will, however, remain unchanged. Customers will continue to receive the full benefit service.

The provision of service to our customers has changed in the last 12 months to accommodate the introduction of JSA. This benefit is paid and processed via Employment Services Jobcentres (ESJ). Benefits Agency staff are now employed in local ESJ premises for this purpose at both Peterlee and Seaham. While some processing functions have been re-organised, no changes have been made in the local service delivery to our customers during the last twelve months.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications the CSA has received for departure from the formula for capital settlement; and how many have been approved. [4421]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Elliot Morley, dated 15 November 1996:

I am replying to you Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency Departures.

In April 1995, the Agency successfully implemented changes for cases where property or capital settlements were an issue. A broad based allowance in exempt income was introduced to recognise that a transfer had taken place, and to avoid the need for lengthy and detailed investigation of the cases involved. To date the Agency has processed over 12,000 applications and over 4,200 allowances have been awarded under this provision. This measure was introduced as a forerunner to the Departures system, which will allow either parent to request detailed consideration of the circumstances of their case.

In April this year the Agency started a trial of the Departures system in the area covered by the Agency Centre in Hastings. So far, around 2,300 applications have been received and the Agency has made decisions in over 80% of the cases. Applications are still being received and the trial will continue up to 2 December 1996, when the full Departures scheme is scheduled to be introduced.

The Agency has had 158 requests for a Departure specifically on the grounds of a property or capital transfer. The Agency has made decisions on 96 of these applications so far and 7 awards have resulted. Of the cases refused, around a quarter were ineligible for a Departure as the amount of the transfer was less than £5,000. The cases where a decision is yet to be made require detailed examination of court orders and related papers to resolve complex issues, such as determining whether property or capital was equally owned and which elements of the transfer were for spousal as opposed to child maintenance.

Decisions made under the trial exercise have no effect on the maintenance payable at this stage. From 2 December 1996, clients who applied as part of the trial will be asked if they wish their applications to proceed under the full scheme.

I hope this is helpful.

War Widows Pensions

Mr. Hinchcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, what estimate he has made of his total liability for war widow's pension from the changes brought in by the Pensions Act 1995 since 19 July 1995; and what has been the actual expenditure over that period. [183]

Mr. Heald *[pursuant to his reply, 4 November 1996, Official Report, c. 384]:* The information that I gave regarding the estimated cost of restoration of war widows pensions was incorrect. The correct information is as follows:

The estimated cost of restoration of war widows pensions under the Pensions Act 1995 to the end of September 1996 is £40 million.

Information on actual expenditure to date on such pensions is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 19 November 1996

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Prisoners of War

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to pay reparations to ex-service personnel who were prisoners of war in Japan. [4304]

Mr. Hanley: Compensation for former prisoners of war was legally settled in the 1951 San Francisco peace treaty. This provided for the proceeds of Japanese assets held by the allies to be used for reparations.

Through the war pensions scheme administered by the Department of Social Security, we have in place a comprehensive system of compensation for anyone disabled as a result of service in the armed forces. Far-eastern former prisoners of war are eligible for the basic war disablement pension and the wide range of supplementary allowances.

Nicaragua

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received from observers to the recent elections in Nicaragua; and if he will make a statement. [4583]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The 93-strong EU observer mission, including Dr. David Browning from Oxford university as the United Kingdom's independent observer, concluded that the elections, although not flawless, were conducted in a fair and transparent manner and contributed to the further consolidation of democracy. The Organisation of American States observer mission took a similar view. Dr. Browning has reported separately that the Nicaraguan people were allowed a free, fair and secret vote. Copies of the EU declaration and a of Dr. Browning's report will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

United Nations

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list United Kingdom contributions to *(a)* the United Nations and *(b)* its agencies in 1995–96; and what is the estimated contribution for 1996–97. [4668]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Details of United Kingdom contributions to the UN and its specialised agencies in 1995 will be placed in the Libraries of the House. Figures for the financial year 1995–96 are not available because they are calculated by calendar year.

Contributions in 1996 and 1997 are expected to be broadly similar.

UNESCO

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to be able to make a statement on United Kingdom membership of UNESCO. [4705]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We have no immediate plans to rejoin UNESCO. This issue is being kept under review in the light of progress with reform in the organisation and other financial priorities.

Ghana

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to ensure that the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana will be free and fair. [4844]

Dr. Liam Fox: We have provided £600,000 for optical scanners and 11 million voter registration forms. We will send four observers as part of the EU observer mission and will participate in a separate Commonwealth mission.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Joint Funding Scheme

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications were made to the joint funding scheme in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97; and how many were successful. [4630]

Dr. Liam Fox: In 1995–96, 359 project applications were made to the joint funding scheme, of which 132 were successful. In 1996–97, 279 applications were received, of which 137 were successful.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the number of joint funding scheme contracts issued by country and region in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97. [4629]

Dr. Fox: Details of projects for which funding agreements were issued under the joint funding scheme in 1995–96 and 1996–97, by country and by region, are as listed.

New projects for which funding agreements were issued under the joint funding scheme—1995–96

By country	*Number*
Angola	1
Bangladesh	4
Bolivia	2
Brazil	2
Cambodia	4
Caribbean	1
Chad	1
Chile	2
China	1
Colombia	1
East Africa	3
Egypt	2
El Salvador	1
Eritrea	1
Ethiopia	9
Gambia, The	1
Ghana	4
Guatemala	1

New projects for which funding agreements were issued under the joint funding scheme—1995–96

By country	*Number*
Guyana	1
India	20
Indonesia	1
International	1
Kenya	7
Latin America	2
Lesotho	2
Malawi	1
Mozambique	1
Namibia	3
Nepal	1
Nicaragua	3
Niger	1
Occupied Territories	1
Pakistan	1
Peru	5
Philippines	3
Solomon Islands	1
South Africa	5
South East Asia	1
Sri Lanka	1
Sudan	2
Tanzania	4
Uganda	7
Vietnam	3
Windward Islands	1
Yemen	1
Zambia	3
Zimbabwe	8
Total	132
By region	
Africa	66
Asia	42
Americas	22
Pacific	1
Worldwide	1
Total	132

New projects for which funding agreements were issued under the joint funding scheme—1996–97

By country	*Number*
Asia Pacific	1
Bangladesh	6
Bolivia	2
Brazil	4
Cambodia	7
Cameroon	3
Chad	1
Chile	1
China	1
Colombia	2
Commonwealth	1
Ethiopia	5
Gambia, The	3
Ghana	5
Guyana	1
India	14
Indonesia	1
Jamaica	1
Kenya	10
Kiribati	1
Laos	1
Lebanon	1
Malawi	1
Middle East	1
Mozambique	1
Myanmar	1
Namibia	2
Nepal	2
Nicaragua	3
Nigeria	2
Occupied Territories	1
Peru	2
Philippines	1
Rwanda	1
Senegal	1
Sierra Leone	3
South Africa	10
Somalia	2
Sri Lanka	4
Sudan	2
Swaziland	4
Syria	1
Tanzania	4
Thailand	3
Togo	1
Uganda	8
Vietnam	1
Zimbabwe	3
Total	137
By regional	
Africa	72
Asia	47
Americas	16
Pacific	1
Worldwide	1
Total	137

Nicaragua

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the projects funded in Nicaragua in 1995–96 and 1996–97 through *(a)* technical co-operation, *(b)* programme aid and *(c)* Commonwealth Development Corporation. [4628]

Dr. Liam Fox:

(a) *Technical Co-operation*

UK Bilateral Programme

English Language Teaching Project.

Land Resources/Fire Risks Mapping Project.

Technical Co-operation Training Programme.

Joint Funding Scheme

Agency	*Project title*
CODA International	Institutional Capacity Building Programme
Health Unlimited	Community Health Care Programme
Marie Stopes International	Developing Participative Programme Management Capacity Family Planning and Health Services
One World Action	Community Health Care Programme Support for Solidez
War on Want	Nanki Luphia Integrated Development Programme
Y Care International	Acanualinca Youth and Community Development Integrated Rural Development Programme
CAFOD	Base Christian Training/Natural Health

Joint Funding Scheme

Agency	*Project title*
	Integrated Social, Economic and Rural Development
	Rehabilitation of War-Wounded
	Street Children's Mural Workshops
	Rural Women's Organisation and Development
Christian Aid	Integrated Development Programme
	Small Projects Fund
	Matagalpa Community Movement
	Women's Co-ops Rotating Credit Fund
	Women's Rights Projects
Oxfam	Training of Women's Movement
	Local Development and Environmental Management
	Programme Support for Capacity Building
	Educational Project for War Disabled
	South-South Environmental Linking
	Project, Training and Organisation of Women's Movement
	Revolving Fund for Small-scale Farmers
	Farmer to Farmer
	Alternative Credit System
	Stocking and Marketing of Agricultural Production
	Economic Support for War Victims
	Training and Organisation of Women's Movement
	Socio-Economic Development Project
	Economic Strategies for Fishing Communities
	Development Practices for Sustainable Agriculture
	Institutional Strengthening
	Economic Development of Campasinos

(b) *Programme Aid*

None.

(c) *CDC*

Almacenadora de Exportaciones—Export warehousing.

Camarones del Pacifico—Shrimp farming.

Compania Licorera de Nicaragua—Rum distillery.

Nicaragua Sugar Estates—Sugar production.

Environmental Auditing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the ways in which his Department has *(a)* demonstrated by example and *(b)* promoted externally, the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing; and if he will make a statement. [4525]

Dr. Liam Fox: In considering project proposals, ODA programme managers are required to consider the need for environmental analysis and audit as set out in "Manual of Environmental Appraisal", a copy of which is in the House Library. ODA supports the demonstration and promotion of environmental auditing as part of its development programmes in a number of countries.

Examples are environmental audit by British Steel of a Zimbabwe Steel Corporation—ZISCO—site as part of an aid and trade provision funded privatisation programme; Audits have also been commissioned for ODA projects in Guyana, privatisation of industrial sectors; in India, potential environmental liabilities associated with power sector reform.

With regard to the promotion of improved efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing, ODA is providing technical assistance to assess the environmental impacts of the Ventanas copper smelter, Chile, upon people living in surrounding areas. The environmental audit of the smelter identified low-cost—no-cost options to manage solid, liquid and gaseous wastes.

In Egypt, ODA is supporting the development and application of environmental auditing skills in three sectors—textiles, oil and soap, and food—through audits of 36 sites, identification of low-cost or no-cost solutions to environmental problems, financial support in the implementation of demonstration projects and training for factory staff and private sector—environmental consultants.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current level of grant aid to Sri Lanka. [4303]

Dr. Liam Fox: We expect to spend nearly £8 million this financial year.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration Rules

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were prohibited from entering the United Kingdom under paragraph 320 of the immigration rules in each year since 1979; and on what grounds. [3684]

Mr. Kirkhope: The statistics available on reasons for refusal relate only to passengers refused and removed at ports in the United Kingdom since 1988. Those reasons for refusal which are wholly or partly linked to paragraph 320 of the rules are given in the table. Corresponding information for earlier years and for entry clearance refusals is not available.

Passengers refused leave to enter and removed at United Kingdom ports for selected reasons for refusal

Main reason for refusal (as recorded in the statistics)	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*[2]1993*	*[2]1994*	*[2]1995*
Transit passenger—not satisfied able and intending to proceed at once to another country, and assured of entry there	679	698	528	884	1,474	1,293	962	941
Lack of returnability or inadequate entry facilities for country of ultimate destination—not allowed to proceed in transit	29	24	41	31	42	74	24	22

Passengers refused leave to enter and removed at United Kingdom ports for selected reasons for refusal

Main reason for refusal (as recorded in the statistics)	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*[2]1993*	*[2]1994*	*[2]1995*
Work permit obtained by deception, or holder of forged, falsified or stolen permit	3	3	9	10	1	6	5	8
Medically undesirable	104	86	26	21	9	2	7	4
Convicted of extradition crime	79	74	83	51	40	22	12	8
Subject of deportation order	49	37	34	28	24	23	21	25
Exclusion conducive to the public good	243	393	631	888	808	886	269	241
No passport or acceptable identity document	415	463	621	732	817	1,068	1,789	1,584
Spurious passport and not qualified for entry	486	408	447	542	386	323	461	256
Lack of UK visa (other than for settlement)[1]	3,090	3,151	3,889	3,921	2,149	1,885	1,636	1,977
Claiming admission as returning resident but not qualified	54	57	55	59	40	31	37	21

[1] Including visa set aside on grounds of misrepresentation, forgery, failure to disclose facts or where a change of circumstances has removed the right of admission.
[2] Data are incomplete.

Battersea Fire Station

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will accept the decision of the London fire and civil defence authority not to retain a second fire appliance at Battersea fire station. [3976]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. and learned Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady O. Maitland) on 16 October 1996, *Official Report*, column *1008*. I understand from the authority that no such decision has been taken.

Violent Videos

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what studies have been (i) carried out and (ii) commissioned by his Department into the effectiveness of the enforcement of the current law on the availability of violent videos to children. [4464]

Mr. Sackville: We are aware of no studies directed specifically at the effectiveness of the enforcement of the current law on the availability of violent videos to children. However, last year my right hon. and learned Friend commissioned research by the university of Birmingham into the effects of videos on the behaviour of young offenders. The results of the research are expected to be published in October 1997.

Earlier this month, in view of the considerable public concern about the level of violence portrayed in videos, my right hon. and learned Friend asked the British Board of Film Classification for a report on the action the board is taking now to reduce the level of violence in videos; the steps it is taking to assess the level of public concern over the issue of violence in videos; and how, for the future, the board plans to adapt its processes and approach to continue properly to discharge its duties under the Video Recordings Act 1984. The report is expected next month.

Fire Service

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the land area of each fire authority in England is designated as C and D risk. [4398]

Mr. Sackville: Information on fire risk category areas is published annually by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. The latest available figures can be found on page 8 of "Fire Service Statistics 1996", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many firefighters have lost their lives since 1990 when attending building fires in designated C and D risk areas. [4397]

Mr. Sackville: From 1 January 1990 to 13 November 1996, eight firefighters have died in fires that started in buildings in designated C or D risk areas in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which fire authorities in England currently provide a level of service in excess of the Home Office's recommended minimum standards of fire cover. [4399]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not collected centrally in the form requested. Statutory responsibility for the provision of an efficient fire service rests with individual fire authorities. It is for the authority to decide whether it wishes to provide fire cover at a level above the national recommended standards.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total expenditure for the last financial year by his Department on defending cases of habeas corpus for asylum seekers held in custody. [4671]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not available.

Ethnic Minorities

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about future arrangements for *(a)* section 11 funding in Birmingham, *(b)* pupil support projects in Birmingham and *(c)* its Home Office grant. [5004]

Mr. Kirkhope: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave on 13 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *242*.

European Court of Justice

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the role of the European Court of Justice in future third pillar conventions; and what conclusions the Government have reached regarding the role of the court in relation to the conventions on the protection of the European Communities' financial interests and on the use of information technology for customs purposes. [5171]

Mr. Howard: The Government's policy on the role of the European Court of Justice in respect of conventions negotiated under the third pillar of the treaty on European Union is to consider each case on its merits. But we and our European Union partners recognised in agreeing to the protocol to the Europol convention that the best way forward in that case lay in a flexible formula under which member states could choose whether to make a declaration that they were prepared to accept the jurisdiction of the court to give preliminary rulings as to the interpretation of the convention on the basis of references by their national courts. As regards the role of the ECJ in the conventions on the protection of the European Communities' financial interests and on the use of information technology for customs purposes, the Government have concluded that they can agree to a flexible solution on similar lines to that in the Europol convention protocol.

Accordingly, we shall signal our agreement to the draft protocols for this purpose prepared by the Irish presidency, which would enable member states to make a declaration accepting ECJ jurisdiction to give preliminary rulings as to the interpretation of these conventions on the basis of references by national courts. We shall make it clear that it would not be the United Kingdom's intention to make such a declaration in respect of our own courts.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Refurbishment Costs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee, pursuant to his answer of 31 October, *Official Report*, column *220*, if he will *(a)* set out the objectives and *(b)* estimate the total individual costs of (i) the second phase of the overhaul of carriage gates, (ii) the external painting and roof repairs at Norman Shaw North, (iii) the repairs carried out to the supporting structure of the Prince's Chamber ceiling, (iv) provision of improved storage in the Library cellars, (v) an improved sales counter at the Speaker's bookstall, (vi) the new pulpit on the main committee corridor and (vii) other projects. [4704]

Sir Raymond Powell: The policy objectives and forecast in-year costs relating to work in the House of Commons are as follows:

Project	*Objective*	*In-year cost to the House* £	*In-year cost total* £
(i) Second phase of overhaul of carriage gates	I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave on 7 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *607*.		
(ii) External painting and roof repairs at Norman Shaw North	To maintain the roof and exterior paintwork	175,000	175,000
(iii) The Prince's Chamber is administered by the House of Lords, for which I have no responsibility.			
(iv) Provision of improved storage in the Library	To provide improved storage and meet health and safety requirements	40,000	40,000
(v) Improved sales counter at Speaker's bookstall	To improve facilities for Members and their visitors	16,000	16,000
(vi) New pulpit on main Committee Corridor	To provide a more effective working area for staff and include access for IT facilities	16,200	27,000
(vii) Other projects	My Committee's policy objective is to achieve exemplary standards of maintenance by carrying out appropriate conservation, maintenance and improvements having regard to health, safety, energy conservation, environmental issues and the historic fabric		

Paintings (Restoration)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee, pursuant to his answer of 31 October, *Official Report*, column *221*, if he will list the 35 oil paintings that have been restored since July in the House, indicating the restoration cost of each painting. [4706]

Sir Raymond Powell: The paintings are those situated in the Strangers and Members Dining Rooms, the Pugin Room, the Smoking Room and the Tea Room. It is not possible to give the cost of restoring each painting separately since the work was done under a single sum contract.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to the Government's response to recommendations 11 and 30 of the second report of the Public Service Committee, on ministerial accountability and responsibility, HC 67 Session 1996–97, if he will introduce proposals to remove the rules relating to the form and content of parliamentary questions. [3885]

Mr. Newton: The recommendations in the Public Service Committee's report, and the Government's response, relate to the answering of parliamentary questions. The recommendations and the responses do not bear on the rules of the House on whether questions are

admissible or are in order. If the hon. Member has proposals for change in these rules, he may wish to draw them to the attention of the Procedure Committee.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Repossessions (Northern Ireland)

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many homes in Northern Ireland have been repossessed in each of the last 10 years. [3853]

Mr. Streeter: The number of writs and originating summonses issued in respect of mortgages by the Chancery Division of the Northern Ireland High Court for each of the last 10 years as follows:

1985: 1,170
1986: 1,545
1987: 2,047
1988: 2,201
1989: 2,459
1990: 2,599
1991: 3,061
1992: 1,646
1993: 1,728
1994: 1,372
1995: 1,220

There are no reliable figures available on the number of decrees for possession granted on foot of these.

The enforcement of judgments office, which is responsible for delivering vacant possession in Northern Ireland, has received the following number of applications to enforce an order for repossession of land for each year over the period:

1988: 657
1989: 718
1990: 748
1991: 832
1992: 683
1993: 492
1994: 468
1995: 396

The figures relating to the number of these which resulted in actual repossessions taking place are not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Legal Aid

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) for what reasons the Legal Aid Board has refused to disclose to the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington *(a)* the total amount Mr. X, whose name has been sent to him, has received in legal aid during the past five years and *(b)* the amount he is due to pay back for such aid which was wrongfully assigned; [4206]

(2) what remedy is available to a person who is sued in court under custody proceedings who cannot afford to employ a solicitor and who faces counsel retained by the litigant who is on legal aid; [4130]

(3) for what reasons the Legal Aid Board has granted legal aid to Mr. X, whose name has been sent to him, for contact and parental responsibility proceedings while the mother of his two children has been refused assistance with legal costs; and what account was taken of her income in assessing her eligibility for legal aid. [4207]

Mr. Streeter: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the highest amount of legal aid granted to a litigant in the last five years. [4120]

Mr. Streeter: The information requested can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, in 1995–96 the largest total payment in a criminal case amounted to £2,946,000, which was paid to lawyers representing a defendant involved in a serious fraud trial. The largest payment in a civil case in the same year was £531,246 in a personal injury case, although the net cost of this case to the fund was nil.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Marchioness Incident

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has received in the past 12 months from survivors of the sinking of the Marchioness, their relatives, friends and legal advisers; and if he will make a statement. [4305]

The Attorney General: Representations have mainly taken the form of questions by hon. Members in this House and in another place about the progress of the review undertaken by the Crown Prosecution Service, which earlier this year re-examined the evidence given to the inquest jury in combination with the pre-inquest evidence. The Director of Public prosecutions announced on 26 July 1996 that the evidence was insufficient to justify any further criminal proceedings.

I have received no subsequent representations.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Potato Industry Development Council

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the result of the consultation on a proposal to establish a Potato Industry Development Council for Great Britain. [5464]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our industry-wide consultation revealed overwhelming support for such a body. Therefore, with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales, I have decided to set up a Potato Industry Development Council for Great Britain.

The council will be responsible for:

commissioning or assisting research and development;

the collection and dissemination of statistical information;

promotion including the development of exports; and

promoting standard products and better defining trade descriptions and consistency in their use.

The council will be funded by a dual statutory levy—an area levy on growers and a tonnage contribution charged at the first point of sale and paid by those purchasing potatoes.

It is our intention that the order establishing the council, which will be made under the Industrial Organisation and Development Act 1947, will be laid before Parliament later this year.

Surplus Food Scheme

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has for a surplus food scheme in 1997. [5465]

Mr. Baldry: Yes. We intend to implement a surplus food scheme in 1997. The scheme will involve UK intervention beef only. It will be supplied in the form of canned stew steak, as was the case in 1995, and will be distributed to those on income support, family credit, jobseeker's allowance, the homeless and destitute and those living in welfare hostels.

The scheme will involve up to 8,000 tonnes of beef containing no offal which will come from animals of less than 30 months of age. All this beef will have been purchased into intervention since April 1996.

I hope that charitable organisations will find the surplus beef to be a help in their efforts.

Woodlands

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what research his Department has *(a)* planned, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* evaluated with regard to integrating proposals to increase deciduous woodland with the creation of woodland-based manufacturing economies; what financial commitments his Department has made in this area; and if he will make a statement; [3229]

(2) what further support his Department proposes to promote existing projects currently experimenting with the integration of woodland-based manufacturing economies with an increase in the planting of deciduous woodland; and what assessment he has made of the advantages of supporting existing projects. [3225]

Mr. Boswell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 18 November, *Official Report*, columns *399–400*, by the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch).

EDS Ltd.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many contracts his Department, agencies and associated bodies have had with EDS for each year since 1985; what was the value of each contract; if he will indicate for each contract *(a)* if it was completed, *(b)* what modifications were made at the request of (i) the company and (ii) his Department and *(c)* if work under contract is being undertaken in-house; and if he will make a statement on the number of job reductions in his Department arising from the contracting out of work by EDS. [3802]

Mr. Boswell: Records held centrally show that neither the core Department nor any of its agencies or associated bodies have held contracts with EDS since 1985. Consequently, there are no values, completion and modification details or in-house working to be reported. No job reductions in the Department fall to be reported, therefore.

Tree Planting

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to continue with initiatives encouraging tree planting in England. [3120]

Mr. Boswell: We shall continue to encourage tree planting in England. As stated in our recent White paper "Rural England—A Nation Committed to a Living Countryside", we would like to see the area of woodland doubled over the next 50 years, subject to the necessary changes in the common agricultural policy.

Beef Consumption

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column *583*, on the use of beef in processed food, if he will set out the arrangement for the removal authorised by the regulation, and the basis of the legal requirement to destroy beef held in intervention prior to 29 March. [4495]

Mrs. Browning: Beef held in intervention store on 27 March 1996 has been identified and, in accordance with regulation (EC) 1757/96, is being held separately from beef purchased after 27 March. Incineration will take place as soon as sufficient capacity can be identified. In any event, destruction must be completed by 31 March 1997. Article 23 of Council regulation (EEC) 805/68 provides the legal base for this destruction. None of the beef purchased before 27 March will be released for human consumption.

BSE

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column *581*, for what reasons 24.9 per cent. of the BSE cases reported between January and March were not subsequently confirmed; what changes in the procedure used have been introduced since then; and what percentage of reported cases were subsequently conformed. [4494]

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Member for Wakefield who is familiar with the way BSE statistics are compiled will of course be aware that the figure given for BSE reported cases necessarily includes cases which recover are alternatively diagnosed and which are still under restriction.

As at 18 November for the period January to March 1996, 4,065 BSE suspect cases were reported in the United Kingdom. Of this figure 2,969 or 73 per cent. cases have been confirmed and 764 or 19 per cent. have proved negative. The difference is accounted for by inconclusive results, alternative diagnosis, animals which have recovered, animals still under restriction and pending results.

For 1993 to 1995, BSE was confirmed in approximately 83 per cent. of the suspects compulsorily slaughtered—average figure for 1993 to 1995. Details of the 1996 confirmation rate will be provided in the November progress report, a copy of which should be placed in the Library of the House in December. This will include details provided in previous reports which indicate seasonal and age related variations in diagnostic rate. The period in question represents the period of each year when diagnostic rate is lowest.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Wakefield of 6 November, *Official Report*, columns *581–82*, on experiments on BSE infectivity, what assessment he has made of the susceptibility of the mice challenged with BSE, relative to the susceptibility of other animals to comparable diseases. [4496]

Mrs. Browning: It is accepted among specialists in this field that there is a likely 3 log difference in sensitivity between the mouse model used for bioassay and assay directly in calves. A specific experiment intended to quantify that difference is still in progress, and while final interpretation is therefore not possible the evidence so far does appear to support the assumption of a 3 log difference.

The same experiment also highlights the compromises that have to be made by using laboratory models in that mouse assays provide results sooner than cattle assays when testing tissues which contain low levels of infectivity, if any at all. Cattle inoculated intracerebrally with pooled lymph nodes or spleen are still clinically healthy 45 months later, but a negative end point will take a further 39 months to achieve. Mouse models currently in use are capable of detecting scrapie in sheep tissues outside the central nervous system. Furthermore, BSE transmits more effectively from central nervous tissue to mice than do known strains of scrapie. It therefore seems logical that the failure to produce a spongiform encephalopathy in mice by the inoculation of bovine tissue indicates at the very least that the level of infectivity in the source tissue is extremely low, and lower than seen with scrapie. It is not simply a reflection of an inefficient model.

Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the current level of support for the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research and that for each of the last 10 years, at current prices. [4730]

Mr. Boswell: The Institute of Grassland and Environment Research was not established until 1989. Using the gross domestic product deflator—1995–96 = 100—as provided by the Treasury, payments made to the institute by the Ministry, at constant prices, in respect of research and development projects are as follows:

	£000
1990–91	10.8
1991–92	8.1
1992–93	7.7
1993–94	7.8
1994–95	7.6
1995–96	7.4
1996–97[1]	6.7

[1] Estimate only.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what plans he has to alter the current level of support for the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research; and if he will make a statement; [4732]

(2) if he will list the projected level of support for the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research in current prices for the next three financial years. [4731]

Mr. Boswell: The Ministry funds research to support its policies, and regularly appraises its research programme and the funding arrangements it has with contractors to ensure policy needs are met.

Final figures on Ministry funding at the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research for 1997–98 and beyond are not yet available, but it is apparent that the level is likely to be reduced. IGER has been made aware that certain projects coming to the end of their contracts in March 1997 will not be renewed. These decisions follow full and detailed review and represent re-prioritisation of the programme. Some of the funding released will be redirected to other priorities but some will go to open competition in the same area, thereby providing opportunities for IGER to submit new research proposals and bid for further funding.

Butter

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure that easy-spread butter is available to British consumers at the same price as ordinary butter. [4369]

Mrs. Browning: The European Commission has concluded that spreadable butter is ineligible for the preferential rate of duty which applies to imports of butter from New Zealand under the general agreement on tariffs and trade current access quota. This is a commercial matter which the New Zealand authorities are pursuing bilaterally with the Commission. Meantime, HM Customs and Excise has been notified of the Commission's conclusion and is acting upon it.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at what time his Department's inspectors at Dover boarded the MV Cap Afrique to speak to the captain of the ship about the prevailing weather conditions on 6 November. [4247]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 15 November 1996]:* Between 1430 and 1500 hours.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many sheep were exported from the United Kingdom between July and October, inclusive, with the place of loading stated as *(a)* Abbotsland farm, Capel Le Ferne, Kent, *(b)* Lydden Court farm, Lydden, Kent, *(c)* Homestead farm, Petham, Kent, *(d)* Uffington Court farm, Adisham, Kent and *(e)* Coxhill farm, Shepherdswell, Kent on the export health certificate. [4249]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 15 November 1996]:* The total number of sheep exported between July and October, inclusive, from these premises is:

	Number
Abbotsland	129,304
Lydden Court	77,687
Homestead	90,717
Uffington	24,121
Coxhill	47,462
Total	369,291

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) which bodies his Department's inspectors at Dover consulted as to whether animals boarding the MV Cap Afrique for sailing on 6 November would be likely to be caused unnecessary suffering or injury while at sea under the terms of the Welfare of Animals During Transport Order 1996; and what decision they reached; [4246]

(2) what steps his Department's inspectors took to ensure that the master of the Cap Afrique exercised his judgment in accordance with article 11 of the Welfare of Animals During Transport Order 1996 on 6 November; and what factors led them to agree that it was acceptable for the MV Cap Afrique to sail at the time it sailed. [4248]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 15 November 1996]:* Information was sought from the Meteorological Office, HM Coastguard at Dover, the Dover harbour board port control office and the animal health and welfare veterinary section at the Ministry's headquarters. The master of the vessel was also consulted. The vessel sailed at approximately 1700 hours with 27 livestock vehicles.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons he has instructed *(a)* that live animals exported for fattening may be sent to the staging post Ryckewaert-Arnout, Loker in Belgium and *(b)* animals for slaughter are prohibited from being sent. [4252]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 15 November 1996]:* At the request of the Belgian authorities, animals for immediate slaughter are not consigned to these premises.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many audits of the work of local veterinary inspectors have been undertaken by his officials during *(a)* July, *(b)* August and *(c)* September for consignments of live sheep for export certified in the area of Dover. [1979]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 4 November 1996]:* During the month of July, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food officials undertook audits of the work of local veterinary inspectors concerning the certification of live sheep for export on three days. The audits took place on two days during August and on two days during September.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many supervised loadings were undertaken by his officials in the area of Dover; and on what dates during *(a)* July, *(b)* August and *(c)* September. [1980]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 4 November 1996]:* During the months of July, August and September, no supervised loadings at lairages were undertaken by Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food officials in the area of Dover. During those months, officials inspected consignments of sheep at the point of loading on to the ship on the following dates:

July 5
July 8 (two sailings)
July 10
July 11
July 12 (two sailings)
July 15
July 16
July 17 (two sailings)
July 18
July 19 (two sailings)
July 20
July 22 (two sailings)
July 23
July 24
July 25
July 26 (two sailings)
July 27
July 29
July 30 (two sailings)
July 31 (two sailings)
August 2
August 3 (two sailings)
August 5
August 6
August 7 (two sailings)
August 8
August 9 (three sailings)
August 10
August 12 (two sailings)
August 14 (two sailings)
August 16 (two sailings)
August 18 (two sailings)
August 20 (two sailings)
August 21
August 22
August 23
August 24
August 27
August 28
August 30
September 3
September 5 (two sailings)
September 10
September 11

September 13 (two sailings)
September 17
September 19
September 21
September 24
September 25
September 27

FU Animal Welfare Inspections

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when an inspector from the European Commission last visited Britain in respect of animal welfare matters; which areas and which types of premises the inspector visited; in respect of which EC directives; and if he will make a statement. [4164]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 15 November 1996]:* From 4 to 7 November an inspector visited a range of premises and facilities in Britain in respect of directive 91/628/EEC.

Cattle Certification

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many bovines animals were identified by his Department as having false or concealed identities on the first day of the special operation in the ports of Stranraer and Cairnryan; and if he will make a statement. [2692]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* During a portal check at Stranraer and Cairnryan on Monday 28 October 1996, a consignment of 34 bovine animals was returned to Northern Ireland due to inadequate certification. The matter is under investigation.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Working Time Directive

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what advice his Department is circulating to Government Departments about the implementation of the working time directive. [4921]

Mr. Freeman: Officials have circulated advice to Departments and agencies. I have arranged for a copy of this advice to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

TRANSPORT

Donaldson Report

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which of the recommendations of the Donaldson report which were referred to in his answer of 14 March, *Official Report*, column *721*, as under consideration *(a)* are to be included in the proposed Merchant Shipping and Maritime Security Bill and *(b)* have been implemented to date; and if he will make a statement. [3507]

Mr. Bowis: The Government have accepted 91 of the Donaldson report's 103 recommendations and rejected only four. Eight remain under consideration. Of these, the Merchant Shipping and Maritime Security Bill includes enabling powers to take forward recommendations 95 and 96, proposing charges for port state control inspections and emergency response. There is no intention of charging for marine search and rescue.

A progress report giving details of the action taken as at 31 October on all the recommendations in the Donaldson report has been placed in the Library of the House.

Merchant Shipping (Waste Facilities)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the responses made to date to his Department's merchant shipping notice M1659 on the provision of waste reception facilities. [4127]

Mr. Bowis: Merchant shipping notice M1659 gave guidance to ports on the development of waste management plans; to date, 55 plans covering 67 ports have been received.

Aircraft Noise (London)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many aeroplanes have landed at Heathrow airport in 1996 before *(a)* 5 am, *(b)* 5.30 am, *(c)* 6 am, *(d)* 6.30 am and *(e)* 7 am. [3913]

Mr. Bowis: Records are not kept in the format requested, but I am able to provide the number of arrivals between 1 January and 31 October prior to 5 am, between 5.01 and 6 am, and between 6.01 am and 7 am. These figures have been taken from the London (Heathrow) airport runway utilisation logs produced by National Air Traffic Services.

Arrivals at Heathrow between midnight and 7.00 am (local time) 1 January 1996 to 31 October 1996

Midnight to 5 am: 1,419
5.01 to 6 am: 2,358
6.01 to 7 am: 9,025

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect of the proposed legal challenge by the International Air Transport Association on the implementation date for the new aircraft noise limits at Heathrow and Gatwick airports. [4363]

Mr. Bowis: None.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the proposals put before the European Commission on 6 November to amend the environmental and safety requirements for vessels carrying irradiated nuclear fuel, plutonium and high–level radioactive waste. [3917]

Mr. Bowis: An explanatory memorandum has been placed in the Library of the House on the Commission's proposal for a Council directive amending directive 93/75/EEC concerning minimum requirements for vessels bound for or leaving Community ports and carrying dangerous or polluting goods. The Government are not aware of any other current proposals to or by the Commission relating to the carriage by sea of irradiated nuclear fuel, plutonium or high–level radioactive wastes.

MV Derbyshire

Mr. Dixon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many contractors were invited to tender for the phase 2 survey of the MV Derbyshire; how many contractors submitted tenders; what were the names of the contractors; what criteria were used to evaluate the tenders; and on what basis the contract was awarded to the Woods Hole institute. [4257]

Mr. Bowis: The project managers and the technical assessors to the Department and the European Commission advised that the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution is the organisation best qualified, in terms of photographic and sonar technology and experience, to meet the objectives of phase 2. In light of this advice the Department and the European Commission agreed that the work should be carried out by Woods Hole.

Mr. Dixon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library copies of the specifications drafted for phases 1 and 2 of the survey of the MV Derbyshire. [4258]

Mr. Bowis: I have placed in the Library copies of the specification for phase 1 and of the latest specification for phase 2.

Mr. Dixon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total cost of the phase 1 survey of the MV Derbyshire; and what is the estimated cost of the phase 2 survey. [4261]

Mr. Bowis: The cost of the at sea element of the phase 1 survey was approximately £0.175 million. The at sea and post-return data processing elements of the phase 2 survey are expected to cost £1.75 million.

Mr. Dixon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the assessors' report of the phase 1 survey of the MV Derbyshire. [4260]

Mr. Bowis: I have placed in the Library the brief produced by the assessors on their return on the conduct and results of the phase 1 survey. Nothing further is being published but interested parties have had access to all the video material recorded during phase 1.

Parking Meters (Enforcement)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the gross costs and charges of parking meter enforcement ceased to be part of the public accounts. [4357]

Mr. Bowis: Drivers who exceed the permitted time at a parking meter may incur an initial excess charge, subsequently followed by a penalty charge. Excess charges have always accrued to the local authority, which must maintain a separate account of income and expenditure arising from on-street parking places. Penalty charges are generally enforced by the serving by traffic wardens of a fixed penalty notice imposing a fine payable into court.

Where local authorities have assumed responsibility for on-street parking enforcement under the Road Traffic Act 1991, penalty charge notices are, however, issued by local authority-employed parking attendants and the income is retained by the authority. All London boroughs had taken on this responsibility by July 1994, but outside London only Hampshire county council, in respect of the city of Winchester, has yet done so.

Railway Accident (Stafford)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what compensation arrangements have been offered to the owners of property alongside the railway as a result of the railway accident at Stafford; and in what ways these arrangements differ from those which British Rail used to make in similar circumstances. [4503]

Mr. Watts: Compensation for property owners suffering loss as a result of any railway accident is a matter between them and whoever may be found liable for the accident. Claims will continue to be dealt with on the basis of liability.

There will be no disadvantage to those suffering injury or loss simply because there is no longer one railway operator. Arrangements have been in place from 1 April 1994 for third parties suffering injury and loss on the railways to claim against a single, industry-controlled, agency, Railway Claims Ltd., created for the purpose, rather than to identify and claim against one or more operators. These arrangements are supervised by the Rail Regulator, who requires all licensed rail operators, which include Railtrack, to join these claims handling and allocation arrangements, and to maintain adequate insurance.

In the case of the Stafford accident, however, a privately owned freight wagon was involved. Private wagon owners are not licensed operators of trains and therefore cannot be obliged by the Rail Regulator to be part of the claims allocation and handling arrangements. However, that is no different from the situation before restructuring, when such owners, which have never been part of British Rail, were accountable for their own actions.

Stevenage Railway Station (Incident)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans the Health and Safety Executive's inspectorate has to publish the report into the incident which occurred at Stevenage railway station on 10 and 11 August 1996. [4502]

Mr. Watts: The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate is currently investigating these two incidents. At present, the HSE has no plans to publish a report.

Barking to Gospel Oak Line

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the visit of the Minister for Railways and Roads to the Barking to Gospel Oak line on 28 October, what conclusions he has reached in respect of the ability of the line to produce an improved passenger service; and if he will make a statement. [4666]

Mr. Watts: My visit confirmed my view that the franchising of North London Railways, the operator of the Barking–Gospel Oak branch, will not only safeguard the current level of service on the line, but will bring about major improvements in its performance. My hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London gave details of the

franchising director's plans for the franchising of NLR in his oral answer to the hon. Member on 28 October, *Official Report*, columns 324–25.

Not least among the benefits of franchising will be the replacement of all the rolling stock currently operating on the branch by the year 2000. I understand that Railtrack is to embark on a strategic study of the Barking to Gospel Oak route, to assess the scope for further developing its use by passenger and freight traffic.

A1 (North London)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the *(a)* traffic volumes, *(b)* traffic speeds and *(c)* bus speeds on the A1 (Archway road) to Upper street, Angel, N1, (i) before it attained red route status and (ii) at present. [4667]

Mr. Bowis: Comprehensive surveys carried out for the Department of Transport on the section of the A1 from Archway road to the Angel showed the following:

		All day average	
	Volume pcu[1]/hr/ direction	*Traffic speed km/hr*	*Bus speed km/hr*
Before red route surveys October 1990	1,160	16.7	12.9
After red route surveys October 1991	1,250	20.1	14.7

[1] pcu = passenger car unit.

No further surveys of an equivalent nature have been carried out.

Plymouth–Heathrow Flights

Mr. Jaimeson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in what circumstances he would be prepared to ring-fence the slots for flights between Plymouth airport and Heathrow. [3947]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 14 November 1996]:* The Government do not consider it appropriate to ring-fence airport slots for domestic routes, as this would distort the aviation market.

Dartford River Crossing

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the value of the public sector cost comparator for the Dartford river crossing *(a)* before and *(b)* after adjustment for risk transfer considerations; and on what dates these figures were first calculated. [4547]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* I have asked the chief executive of Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours, dated 19 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the value of the public sector comparator for the Dartford River Crossing.

A separate public sector comparator was not necessary in this case because bids to design, build, finance and operate the new Queen Elizabeth II Bridge and to operate and maintain the existing Dartford Tunnels were invited on the basis of both public and private procurement methods.

Rail Routing Guide

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many complaints have been received about the routing guide recently published by the franchising director and the Rail Regulator. [4548]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* Since the routing guide became operational on 29 September, 36 complaints have been received by my Department, the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and the Office of the Rail Regulator. The guide has been improved experimentally for a period of eight months, and may be amended in the light of experience.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 November. [3520]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 November. [3519]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

ENVIRONMENT

Sustainable Development

14. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his assessment of the desirability of issuing planning policy guidance on the subject of sustainable development based on the recommendations made in agenda 21. [3131]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Planning policy guidance has been progressively updated to take account of sustainable development. My Department is also preparing a better practice guide on how to implement sustainable development more effectively through the planning system to be published next year.

Rio Treaty

17. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the measures the Government have taken to implement the Rio treaty of June 1992. [3134]

Mr. Clappison: The UK has met its commitments in full under the action plan initiated by the Prime Minister following Rio and agreed by European and G7 colleagues.

Local Authority Housing

18. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what policies exist for maximising investment in local authority housing. [3135]

Mr. Curry: In 1996–97 under the housing investment programme £1.2 billion was allocated to local authorities in a competitive process which directed resources to those

authorities best able to make use of them. This competitive system encourages local authorities to consider all available mechanisms for the provision of social housing in their area and increase the contribution made by private finance.

27. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities transferred *(a)* all and *(b)* part of their housing stock to new landlords in the last year. [3144]

Mr. Curry: The 1995 large-scale voluntary transfer programme included 11 local authorities which transferred all or part of their housing stock to 12 registered housing associations. Of these, four were partial transfers. In the current—1996—programme two local authorities have transferred their housing stock to two registered housing associations. One of these was a partial stock transfer and the other a whole stock transfer. A further three authorities propose to transfer all their stock by the end of this financial year.

Rough Sleepers Initiative

19. **Mr. Couchman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to further extend the rough sleepers initiative. [3136]

Mr. Curry: In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) on 31 October, *Official Report*, column *187*, I described the Government's plans to expand the rough sleepers initiative in London, extend it to Brighton and establish a new rough sleepers revenue fund. Together with the extension of the rough sleepers initiative to Bristol earlier this year, these measures demonstrate the Government's commitment to ensuring that there is no necessity for people to sleep rough.

Local Authority Spending

20. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met local authority leaders to discuss the Government's contribution to local authority spending. [3137]

Sir Paul Beresford: My hon. Friend the Secretary of State last met the leaders of the local authority associations at the Consultative Council on Local Government Finance on 16 October to discuss the prospects for the 1997–98 settlement. He is also due to meet the chairman of the local authority associations this afternoon, 19 November, and the 1997–98 local government finance settlement will be one of the items on the agenda.

Private Finance Initiative

21. **Sir John Hannam:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to encourage local authorities to bring forward projects under the private finance initiative. [3138]

Mr. Gummer: On 31 October we relaxed the capital finance rules to promote the private finance initiative in local government. We also issued guidance on those relaxations and associated arrangements for revenue support for PFI projects.

Village Shops and Post Offices

22. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce rate relief for village shops and post offices. [3139]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Local Government and Rating Bill, which was introduced on 24 October, will give 50 per cent. mandatory rate relief to certain general stores and post offices in villages of 3,000 people or less. This will halve their bills. Local authorities will be able to top the relief up to 100 per cent., if they choose.

The Bill will also give local authorities significant new discretionary powers which will enable them to reduce or waive the rates bills of any other business in the village which is important to the local community.

Local Authority Capital Investment

23. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the construction industry concerning local authority capital investment. [3140]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Some construction industry organisations have proposed in their budget submission the further release of local authority capital receipts to encourage capital investment.

Thames Gateway Initiative

24. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress with the Thames gateway initiative. [3141]

Mr. Curry: Achieving the vision for Thames gateway is a long-term, 20 to 30-year project. Nevertheless, I am greatly encouraged by progress since publication of the Thames gateway planning framework in June 1995, both in general awareness of the area and its opportunities and in the investment which is already being made.

London Government

25. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning regional government in Greater London. [3142]

Sir Paul Beresford: None.

Environmental Targets

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the Government's policy on the setting of environmental targets. [3143]

Mr. Clappison: The Government consider that sustainable development targets can be important and are ready to set quantified targets where this would be sensible. Such targets must be underpinned by scientific analysis and an assessment of the likely costs and benefits—including those to the environment. The Government list the quantified targets that they have agreed or are considering in their "The Common Inheritance" annual reports.

Urban Land (Development)

28. **Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much new development currently takes place on derelict or underused urban land; and what was the situation three years ago. [3145]

Mr. Gummer: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to my hon Friend the member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) earlier today.

Gosport Borough Council

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will compensate Gosport borough council for the loss of standard spending assessments in 1997–98 and 1996–97 resulting from errors in the population date relating to service personnel in Gosport. [3930]

Sir Paul Beresford: The population data used in standard spending assessments are those estimated by the Registrar General, using the best information available to him at the time. Information on service personnel is provided to the Registrar General by the Defence Analytical Services Agency. I understand that, following consultations with DASA, the Registrar General's estimates took account of concerns expressed by Gosport borough council relating to service personnel, to the extent that they appeared to him to be valid. I am aware that the methods of deriving the components of the population estimates are continually being refined; consequently, it is sometimes possible to produce updated estimates which differ from those provided previously for the calculation of SSAs. In the interests of certainty in financial allocations to local authorities, it is our general policy not to take account of any such subsequent refinements to any indicators, once the data have been used in the calculation of SSAs.

Sewage Effluent (Hormones)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the conclusions of the report by Brunel university on the levels of female hormones found in sewage effluent discharged into watercourses and the sea around the United Kingdom; and what plans he has to ensure that water companies extract these hormones from discharges. [4482]

Mr. Clappison: The Environment Agency commissioned this report. Further work is needed to establish whether these hormones need to be removed from sewage effluent. The water industry is investigating further how they are affected by the sewage treatment process. The Environment Agency plans further work to establish how the hormones are broken down naturally after discharge. With the Natural Environment Research Council, it is also examining whether the presence of these substances has any implications for fish populations and their fertility. Most of the rivers adjacent to the seven treatment works tested in this study support thriving fish populations.

Water Payments

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when water payments ceased to be treated as part of Government accounts in *(a)* England and Wales, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Northern Ireland. [4356]

Mr. Clappison: The information is as follows:

In England and Wales, the 10 water and sewerage companies ceased to be within the public sector and their external finance requirement ceased to be counted against public expenditure for Government accounting purposes from the date of their privatisation on 12 December 1989;

In Scotland, the external finance requirements of water authorities and domestic sewerage relief grants have counted against public expenditure since 1 April 1996; prior to April 1996 the capital expenditure financed by borrowing by the predecessor local authorities scored against public expenditure totals, as did central Government assistance through the revenue support grant and grants such as the rural water grant.

In Northern Ireland, the Water Service, an executive agency of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, is the provider of public water and sewerage services and its finances are included in Government accounts.

Disabled Facility Grants

Mr. Hawksley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the legislation will be implemented in respect of disabled facility grants for local authorities. [4748]

Mr. Clappison: Part I of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, which includes the provisions on disabled facilities grants, will come into force on 17 December 1996.

Council House Sales

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many individuals have bought their council houses under the right to buy; and if he will make a statement. [3521]

Mr. Clappison: Local authorities and new towns in England reported have that between the introduction of right-to-buy legislation in October 1980 and the end of June 1996—the latest date for which information is available—the total RTB sale is 1.270 million homes.

Outer-London Boroughs

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received in respect of the London borough of Havering and other outer-London boroughs and the standard spending assessment and area cost adjustment. [3637]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration received a delegation led by the London borough of Havering which included representatives from the London boroughs of Bexley, Bromley, Harrow, Kingston and Sutton about the area cost adjustment on 11 November.

Other written representations have recently been received on standard spending assessments, including from outer-London boroughs.

Sheffield City Council

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from Sheffield city council regarding the area cost adjustment and its effect on Sheffield's standard spending assessment. [3826]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have received a number of representations on the area cost adjustment from Sheffield city council, both individually and as part of larger groups of local authorities. The city council has drawn attention to the reduction in its standard spending assessment which would follow from the recommendations of the review of the area cost adjustment. It has urged us not to implement those recommendations.

Special Advertisement Control

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what decision he has made on the proposed abolition of the regime of special advertisement control; and if he will make a statement. [4798]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: After consideration of the extensive public consultation exercise over the future of special controls, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has decided that they will remain for the time being.

The regime of special advertisement control was originally introduced in 1948 to remove the proliferation of poster panels along main roads in the countryside and to ensure continued protection against further unsuitable displays.

My Department has commissioned research into areas of special control of advertisements because little appeared to be known or properly understood about the practical consequences of ASCA designation. Contrary to the belief of many, the removal of the ASCA regime would not have created an "open season" on advertising in the countryside, because these special controls largely duplicate advertisement controls already available to local planning authorities. In particular, all new poster hoardings, except certain temporary displays screening building sites, would still have required consent from local planning authorities to be lawfully displayed. Consultation revealed that local authority associations, planning practitioners and amenity societies were not in favour of complete abolition of the regime as proposed, but wished to retain the level of protection it afforded. Having carefully considered these representations, my right hon. Friend believed it was right to continue with the ASCA regime for the time being. As for the future, we shall be looking to see if there are sensible modifications that can be made to existing systems to provide the same protection of amenity with less bureaucracy.

Copies of all the representations made in response to the Department's consultation paper have been placed in the Library of the House.

Business Rates

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 14 November, *Official Report*, column *323*, on local authorities' receipts from business rates on sporting rights, on what he based his estimate of the total business rates paid on sporting rights. [4974]

Mr. Gummer: The total rateable value of sporting rights in England which are severed from the occupation of land is £8.2 million. No figures are available for sporting rights which are not severed and which fall to be valued as part of the land over which they are exercised. For estimating purposes, we took the additional rateable value of such rights across England to be between £2 million and £3 million.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Sports Council

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she received the annual report and accounts of the Sports Council for *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96; if she will publish them; and if she will make a statement. [3866]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Sports Council's annual accounts for the years 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96 were received and laid before Parliament on the following dates:

Account	*Received*	*Laid*
1993–94	19 July 1994	17 October 1994
1994–95	18 September 1995	29 November 1995
1995–96	23 July 1996	9 September 1996

The Sports Council's last annual report was published in 1993. The council hopes to publish an annual report for 1995–96 in early January 1997.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Administration Costs

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will publish the administrative cost (i) per pupil, (ii) per school and (iii) per head of population incurred by central Government in each of the five years to 1995–96. [4568]

Mr. Robin Squire: The direct administrative costs incurred centrally by the Department for Education and Employment for staff involved in schools work in England in 1995–96 were:

(i) £2.46 per pupil

(ii) £750 per school

(iii) £0.41 per head of population

Comparable information for earlier years is difficult to obtain because of changes in the organisation of the Department. Provision of this information would incur disproportionate cost.

Special Needs Pupils

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on what basis extra per capita funding is available for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school pupils with special educational needs. [4500]

Mr. Robin Squire: When allocating funds to schools under local management of schools schemes, local education authorities may include factors in their formulae which allocate additional funding for non-statemented special educational needs based on proxy indicators of need such as free school meals, or direct indicators of need such as SEN audits. Such factors may be applied to both primary and secondary schools.

Home-school Contracts

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the level of support for home-school contracts following the consultation on circular 6/96; and if she will make a statement. [4501]

Mr. Forth: The principle of home-school agreements is generally supported. Different views are taken on their use in admission arrangements. The proposals in the Education Bill would give school admission authorities the flexibility to decide for themselves.

Small Businesses

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she proposes to take to improve the participation of representatives of small businesses in committees of inquiry, advisory bodies and non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible. [4383]

Mr. Paice: In making appointments to executive non-departmental public bodies the Department conforms with the code and guidance issued by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Central to the code is the overriding principle of selection based on merit. Where appropriate, ENDPB posts are advertised in the national press and/or details circulated to representational bodies. It is, of course, possible for an individual to nominate anyone for appointment to a post, including themselves. Advisory bodies are exempt from the OCPA code but are encouraged to comply with it when making appointments.

The membership of the Department's only committee of inquiry, the committee of inquiry into higher education, was finalised only after wide consultation, including employers' representative bodies.

Investors in People

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 4 November, *Official Report*, columns *378—79*, if she will list the members of the Investors in People UK board whose main business activity involves the running of a firm with *(a)* under 100 employees, *(b)* under 50 employees, *(c)* under 20 employees and *(d)* under 10 employees. [4440]

Mr. Paice: On the board of Investors in People UK there are two directors whose main business activity involves the running of a firm where the number of employees fall within the categories above. These are:

(a) under 100—Mr. Martin Henry, Lastolite Ltd. and

(d) under 10—Mrs. Susan Todd, Polymedia Ltd.

Bradford City Technology College

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what right of appeal exists for parents refused a place for a child at the city technology college in Bradford; and what representations she has received about the catchment area of the Bradford CTC; [4441]

(2) what guidance she has issued to the city technology college in Bradford concerning the catchment area of the college; for what reason *(a)* the BD15 postcode area is included and *(b)* the BD13 post code area is excluded; how far each is from the college; and if she will make a statement. [4442]

Mrs. Gillan: Dixons city technology college in Bradford recently sought approval from the Secretary of State for an extension to its catchment area. In the light of representations from Bradford LEA, the local diocesan boards and a number of schools in the vicinity, a limited extension was agreed for admissions for the 1997–98 academic year onwards. The extension includes the BD15 post code; coverage of the BD13 post code was not requested. Both these post code areas are some 2.5 miles from Dixons CTC at their nearest point, but BD13 extends further away from the school.

Dixons CTC offer an appeal procedure for parents refused a place for their child. The appeals procedure is explained during the admissions process and written details are automatically given to parents of every unsuccessful pupil.

Education Expenditure

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the total United Kingdom education expenditure *(a)* at current prices, *(b)* as a percentage of United Kingdom gross national product and *(c)* as a percentage of total public expenditure in (i) 1966–67, (ii) 1976–77, (iii) 1986–87 and (iv) 1996–97. [2710]

Mr. Robin Squire: *[holding answer 5 November 1996]:* Data for 1966–67 are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Outturn information for 1996–97 is not currently available. Figures for 1995–96 have been substituted.

	1976–77	*1986–87*	*1995–96*
Total UK public expenditure on education at current prices	£7.8 billion	£18.7 billion	£35.9 billion (est. outturn)
As a percentage of GNP	5.9 per cent.	4.8 per cent.	5.1 per cent.
As a percentage of total public expenditure	13.0 per cent.	11.3 per cent.	11.9 per cent.
Number of pre-16 pupils in the maintained sector	10.113 million	7.923 million	7.957 million

SCOTLAND

Smallholdings

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assistance his Department gives to encourage smallholdings. [3451]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: A comprehensive range of measures to support the agriculture industry in Scotland is available for all sizes of farms, including smallholdings and crofts. Details of grant schemes, sources of advice and other assistance are provided in "Scottish Agriculture: A Guide to Grants and Services", which can be obtained from local offices of the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department. I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

Oil Rig Construction Sites

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total number of oil rig construction sites built by the Government which are currently derelict; and if he will list their current owners. [4282]

Mr. Kynoch: None.

Mrs. Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to make special funding available to local authorities for the reinstatement of former oil rig construction sites. [4284]

Mr. Kynoch: I have no plans to make special funding available to local authorities for the reinstatement of former oil rig sites.

Mrs. Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to regenerate derelict oil rig construction sites; and if he will make a statement. [4283]

Mr. Kynoch: I am not aware of any derelict oil rig construction sites in Scotland.

Mrs. Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those oil rig construction sites where the Government have a duty to restore the area's former natural landscape. [4285]

Mr. Kynoch: There are none.

House Completions

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what was the total number of completions of housing association properties for rent within Scottish Homes' approved development programme in each district and island council area in each of the years 1989–90 to 1995–96; [4286]

(2) what was the total number of new starts of housing association properties for rent within Scottish Homes' approved development programme in each district and island council area in each of the years 1989–90 to 1995–96. [4287]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The available information is held by Scottish Homes. I have asked its chairman, Mr. John Ward, to write to the hon. Member.

Highlands and Islands Convention

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department will be responsible for meeting the travel and accommodation expenses for those invited to attend the proposed convention of the highlands and islands; and if he will make a statement. [4845]

Mr. Kynoch: Yes.

Deportation

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons awaiting deportation are currently detained in *(a)* HM prison Greenock and *(b)* other prisons; what is the average length of detention served by such a person; and if he will make a statement. [3717]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 19 November 1996:

Lord James Douglas–Hamilton has asked me to reply to your question relating to the number of persons awaiting deportation who are currently held at HM Prison, Greenock and at other prisons and the average length of detention served by such persons.

Persons detained in Scotland under the Immigration Act are normally held at Greenock, Edinburgh and Aberdeen prisons until their deportation order is served or their case is otherwise disposed of by the immigration authorities.

There are currently six such people held at Greenock and one at Aberdeen. In the past twelve months the average length of detention has been 10 weeks.

Arable Area Payments

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many payments were made in Scotland in 1995–96 under the arable area payments scheme *(a)* between £0 and £5,000, *(b)* £5,001 and £10,000, *(c)* £10,001 and £15,000, *(d)* £15,001 and £20,000, *(e)* £20,001 and £25,000, *(f)* £25,001 and £50,000, *(g)* £50,001 and £75,000, *(h)* £75,001 and £100,000, *(i)* £100,001 and £150,000, *(j)* £150,001 and £200,000, *(k)* £200,001 and £250,000 and *(l)* £250,001 and over. [4216]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* The information relating to payments made to farmers in Scotland under the 1995 arable area payments scheme is as follows:

	Number
£0–£5,000	4,990
£5,001–£10,000	708
£10,001–£15,000	856
£15,001–£20,000	626
£20,001–£25,000	512
£25,001–£50,000	1,200
£50,001—£75,000	394
£75,001–£100,000	148
£100,001–£150,000	97
£150,001–£200,000	26
£200,001–£250,000	6
£250,001 and over	4

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many payments were made in Scotland in 1995–96 for set-aside under the arable area scheme *(a)* between £0 and £5,000, *(b)* £5,001 and £10,000, *(c)* £10,0001 and £15,000, *(d)* £15,001 and £20,000, *(e)* £20,001 and £25,000, *(f)* £25,001 and £50,000, *(g)* £50,001 and £75,000, *(h)* £75,001 and £100,000, *(i)* £100,001 and £150,000, *(j)* £150,001 and £200,000 and *(k)* over £200,001. [4228]

Mr. Robertson *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* The information relating to set-aside payments made to farmers in Scotland under the 1995 arable area payments scheme is as follows:

	Number
£0–£5,000	3,282
£5,001–£10,000	965
£10,001–£15,000	265
£15,001–£20,000	86
£20,001–£25,000	52
£25,001–£50,000	31
£50,001–£75,000	3
£75,001–£100,000	3

There were no set-aside payments in excess of £100,000.

WALES

Suicides

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of suicides among under-30s, broken down by gender, in Wales for each year since 1985. [3831]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested, provided by the Office for National Statistics, is given in the table.

Suicides[1] of Welsh residents—under 30

	Males	*Females*
1985	63	12
1986	36	11
1987	59	12
1988	49	12
1989	42	10
1990	65	8
1991	60	18
1992	70	15
1993	64	6
1994	72	12
1995	72	13

[1] International Classification of Diseases (9th revision): E950–E959, E980–E989 (excluding E988.8).

Dyslexia

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to liaise with universities and colleges with a view to assisting those with dyslexia into further education and higher education; and if he will make a statement. [4203]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: None. Guidance to the Welsh funding councils on their responsibilities for students with learning difficulties was set out in separate letters dated 5 May 1992 and 27 May 1992, paragraphs 22–24 and 28–32 respectively. Copies of both letters have been placed in the Library of the House.

Section 4 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 specifies how the Further Education Funding Council for Wales must discharge its further education duties—sections 2 and 3 of the Act—in relation to students having learning difficulties. It required the FEFCW to have regard to the requirements of those with learning difficulties and to arrange placements for them in independent specialist institutions where appropriate; it also defines a learning difficulty for the purposes of the Act.

In practice, the FEFCW makes funds available to colleges of further education to secure provision appropriate for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This provision can be discreet programmes in independent living skills or it can be to support inclusion on mainstream programmes of study. Assistance for students with dyslexia is generally of the latter kind. The FEFCW also makes available funds to colleges to diagnose dyslexia and support students by providing specialist tutorials and equipment. In addition, the FEFCW has allocated funds specifically to promote on-course support for students with functional literacy needs. One of the most successful colleges in diagnosing dyslexia among students and offering support is Deeside college, which is the only college in the UK registered to use the Irlan diagnostic methodology developed in the USA.

In addition to the above, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 places a duty on the FEFCW to require further education colleges to publish disability statements about the provision of facilities for education made by a college in respect of people with disabilities. A copy of Welsh

Office circular 48/96, setting out the FEFCW's and colleges' responsibilities in this area, is also in the Library. The governing bodies of higher education institutions are required to provide disabled students with a description of the facilities for education and research that they offer.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of persons who are currently employed in opencast mining activities in Wales. [4392]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Coal Authority estimates that there were 708 full-time employees in opencast mining in Wales at August 1996.

Home Energy Conservation Act 1995

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 will come into force in Wales. [4486]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: On 1 April 1997.

Environment Annual Report

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what additional resources he intends to commit to ensure the implementation of the commitments to environmental improvement set out at pages 30 to 35 of his annual report on the environment in Wales. [4722]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My right hon. Friend's expenditure plans, including those for his environment programmes, are published annually in the Welsh Office's departmental report. The environment in Wales fifth report—pages 24 and 10—included reference to the increased provision that has been made available to the Countryside Council for Wales and to the resources provided to support the work of the Sea Empress environmental evaluation committee.

Roads

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the stress points on motorways and major roads in Wales; and what assessment he has made of the implications for the investment and regeneration of the economy. [4552]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The south Wales area traffic study, published in December 1990, and the north-east Clwyd traffic study, published in November 1991, looked at traffic levels, traffic growth and future capacity requirements for the road network in those areas of Wales. There is a degree of assessment of potential economic growth associated with such studies. Copies of both reports are in the Library of the House.

Health Care Emergency Centres

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the primary care emergency centres belonging to *(a)* general practitioner co-operatives, *(b)* Healthcall and *(c)* other providers which are grant aided from his Department's funds. [5005]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not held centrally. Responsibility for monitoring general practitioner out of hours arrangements rests with individual health authorities.

Public Bodies (Capital Expenditure)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what sanctions he can apply to public bodies dependent on his Department's approval for expenditure on capital projects which overspend on such projects by 10 per cent. or more; and what procedures he has to detect unapproved overspends of 10 per cent. or more. [5007]

Mr. Hague: The Welsh Office determines levels of delegated authority for capital expenditure by public bodies such as non-departmental public bodies and NHS trusts. Within these delegations the bodies themselves are responsible for managing their capital projects, including any possible overspends. For projects above the delegated limits a variety of arrangements are in place in the Department to ensure effective monitoring and control of expenditure. These are tailor-made to meet the particular circumstances of the capital expenditure programme concerned. Expenditure on major capital projects is monitored and reported quarterly to senior management of the Department, and to the Treasury. Information about major capital projects is included in the Welsh Office departmental report, Cm 3215.

South and East Wales Ambulance NHS Trust

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 1 November, *Official Report*, column *295*, on what date he was notified by the South and East Wales Ambulance NHS Trust of the overspend above the estimated £2.4 million cost of relocating its headquarters; and on what date he was informed of the trust's internal costing of the project at £3.1 million. [5009]

Mr. Hague: My officials were notified on 29 January 1996 of a possible overspend of £556,000 and on 28 August 1996 that the trust's internal costings for the scheme had been £3.1 million.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to paragraph 32 of the district auditor's summary reports entitled "Review of Centralisation, including Command and Control, South—East Wales Ambulance Trust", if he has approved the £1.2 million overspend on the relocation project; and if he has received from the trust the details of the increase in costs and the explanations recommended by the district auditor. [5008]

Mr. Hague: No. The detailed explanation for the increase in the costs of the scheme has not yet been received.

Health Service Expenditure

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the *(a)* net expenditure and *(b)* gross expenditure on the national health service in Wales in each year since 1974–75. [5033]

Mr. Hague: Information for the years 1974–75 to 1994–95 is published in "Health and Personal Social Services Statistics for Wales", table 2.01 of the finance

chapter. Provisional figures for 1995–96 can be found in the appropriation accounts for 1995–96. Copies are in the Library of the House.

Secondees and Consultants

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 12 November, *Official Report*, column *210*, concerning departmental staffing, in which divisions each of the *(a)* secondees and *(b)* consultants is working; and how many of the secondees are (i) full—time equivalent and (ii) part—time equivalent. [5035]

Mr. Hague: Two secondees work in the finance group; nine work in the Health Department and two are in the health professional group. Only one of the 13 is part—time.

The consultants are working on projects for various divisions throughout the Welsh Office.

Eurofreight Terminal Grant

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency concerning grant in aid and agency funding for a Eurofreight terminal at *(a)* Wentlooge Levels and *(b)* Pengan Moors. [5006]

Mr. Hague: My officials have corresponded with the agency about possible funding for a Eurofreight terminal in south Wales. The agency is aware it will need my approval before incurring expenditure on a scheme for a European freight terminal.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish that part of the service level agreement between his Department and the Welsh Health Common Services Authority concerned with the supervision of the Welsh community health councils; and what proposals he has to ensure that community health councils have the freedom to criticise under the proposals for the new service level agreement. [5032]

Mr. Hague: Community health councils will shortly be consulted on a revised service level agreement. I will place a copy of the agreed document in the Library of the House when that consultation has been concluded.

Patients Charter

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the cost of the exercise initiated by the letter of 31 May 1995 from his Department to chief executives of health authorities and NHS trusts concerning the patients charter; how many news stories it generated; and to what extent doctors and nurses participated in his Department's press conference. [5034]

Mr. Hague: The cost to each health authority and NHS trust of publicising its achievements is an issue for each chief executive.

Information on the level of NHS generated news stories is not held centrally.

Members of the NHS were not invited to participate in the Welsh Office launch of the 1995 NHS performance tables.

Public Appointments

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those bodies in Wales to which he appoints one or more members and give the total cost of remuneration to those members *(a)* in salary or allowances and *(b)* expenses in the last year for which figures are available. [4797]

Mr. Hague: The information available centrally about the appointments I make, including remuneration, is contained in "Appointments by the Secretary of State for Wales, 1 September 1996", copies of which are available in the Library of the House. Information on expenses is not collected centrally.

TREASURY

EDS Ltd.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many contracts his Department, agencies and associated bodies have had with EDS for each year since 1985; what was the value of each contract; if he will indicate for each contract *(a)* if it was completed, *(b)* what modifications were made at the request of (i) the company and (ii) the Department and *(c)* if work under contract is being undertaken in-house; and if he will make a statement on the number of job reductions in his Department arising from the contracting out of work by EDS. [3799]

Mr. Jack: Since 1985, the Chancellor of the Exchequer's departments have had one contract with EDS—the Inland Revenue's 10–year contract for the provision of IT services, which started on 1 July 1994 and which was valued at £1.03 billion.

The contract has been modified a number of times to make minor procedural changes by mutual agreement to benefit both parties. Significant changes have been made in only three main areas: the completion of the master service level agreement, to define the quality and quantity of service, as required by the terms of the contract; an extension to the contract to include staff who provided support to the Inland Revenues's statistics and economics office; extension of the licensing for Oracle software and to provide for 24-hour remote support;

It is not always possible to attribute each change to either the Inland Revenue or EDS, although the change for the transfer of additional staff was at the Inland Revenue's request.

No work under contract with EDS is undertaken in-house, although the Inland Revenue has a small team of IT technical specialists to validate EDS proposals.

Inland Revenue staff reductions arising from the EDS contract were 2,074. They were transferred to EDS in two tranches on 1 July 1994 and 1 January 1996.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the names of those hon. Members who have made representations to him in support of *(a)* Oracle and *(b)* EDS Ltd. involvement in the computerised environment for self-assessment. [1633]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* My right hon. and learned Friend has received no such representations.

Married Person's Tax Allowance

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the total cost in lost revenue of introducing a married person's tax allowance based on *(a)* £500 per married person, *(b)* £750 per married person and *(c)* £1,000 per married person. [3901]

Mr. Jack: The cost would depend on whether the proposed allowance replaced or was in addition to the existing married couple's allowance and whether it was available at marginal rates or at a fixed rate.

Parent Tax Allowance

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the impact on revenue of introducing a tax allowance for a nominated parent of *(a)* £200 per child, *(b)* £500 for a second and subsequent children and *(c)* £200 for a first and second child and £500 for successive children. [3903]

Mr. Jack: Estimated full-year costs at 1996–97 income levels are given in the table. The assumption has been made that the nominated parent is the husband, allowances are given at marginal tax rates and any unused allowances cannot be transferred to the wife. Lone parents are also assumed to be entitled to these allowances.

	Level of child tax allowance (£)			
	First child	*Second child*	*Third/fourth child*	*Cost in a full year[1] £ million*
(a)	200	200	200	450
(b)	200	500	500	750
(c)	200	200	500	530

[1] Based on a projection of the 1994–95 Survey of Personal Incomes.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what proposals he has for checking the rise in the pound; [4752]

(2) if he will list the performance of the pound sterling against the other currencies of the European monetary system in terms of the 2 per cent. and the 6 per cent. bands for every quarter since the last quarter of 1992. [4765]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Government recognise the value of a stable exchange rate but do not have a target for sterling. The exchange rate is only one of many factors that has to be taken account of in policy decisions.

Data on sterling exchange rates against other EU currencies can be found in "Main Economic Indicators", which is published monthly by the OECD.

Income Tax Cuts

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the reduction in tax paid per year in cash terms, and as a percentage of the total gross annual income, for each income decile group, resulting from a 1p reduction in the standard rate of income tax. [4467]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* Information on the effect of a 1p reduction in the basic rate of income tax at 1996–97 income levels is given in the table.

Group of taxpayers per cent.	*Reduction in income tax £ million*	*Reduction as a percentage total income per cent.*
Top 10	520	0.4
11–20	380	0.6
21–30	270	0.5
31–40	190	0.5
41–50	130	0.4
51–60	80	0.3
61–70	40	0.2
71–80	10	under 0.1
81–90	0	0
Bottom 10	0	0

Outstanding Tax

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much is owed to the Inland Revenue in uncollected *(a)* income tax, *(b)* corporation tax, *(c)* inheritance tax, *(d)* capital gains tax and *(e)* VAT. [4470]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 13 November at column *228* in respect of figures for uncollected income tax, corporation tax and VAT.

The figures for inheritance tax and capital gains tax are given in the table. In this question, "uncollected" has been taken to mean "uncollected and subsequently written off or remitted".

Inland Revenue collection accounts are drawn up each year to the end of October, and the table therefore shows the amounts as at the end of October 1995—the latest date for which figures are available. The information can also be found in the board of Inland Revenue's annual report.

Type of tax	*Amount remitted/written off (rounded to nearest £ million) October 1995*
Inheritance tax	2
Capital gains tax	34

With the exception of small amounts remitted or written off in respect of Development Land Tax and miscellaneous other duties, and subject to rounding, these two items represent the amounts included under 'other taxes' in the previous answer.

Inland Revenue Computers

Mr. Madden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what physical protection and contractual safeguards he has arranged to prevent breach of taxpayers' confidentiality by software suppliers allowed emergency access from terminals in America and Australia to the Inland Revenue's computer system. [1978]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 4 November 1996]:* I refer to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) on 13 November at columns *226–27*.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what alternatives to overseas support for the protection of Inland Revenue data against operational risk of a shutdown or slowdown of the self-assessment system were examined by Ministers before revision of the Oracle contract. [1635]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* I considered all alternative technical support arrangements, but none provided the degree of protection that is required.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if Inland Revenue data can be accessed by Oracle facilities overseas before legal or other contractual safeguards concerning the security or holding of that data have been contractually agreed between Oracle and persons representing the Inland Revenue. [1637]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* No.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date the computerised environment for self-assessment systems will be fully operational and in what way policy has recently changed with regards to security aspects of the holding of Inland Revenue self-assessment data. [1638]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* The new self-assessment computer system is being brought in in stages, as required, over a period of some 18 months. As regards the security aspects, I refer to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) on 13 November at columns *226–27.*

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons it is not possible to require under the contract between Oracle and the Inland Revenue adequate back-up facilities for fault correction in the computerised environment for self-assessment. [1639]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* Oracle is supplying, under contract to Electronic Data Services Ltd., the Inland Revenue's information technology partner, full back-up support for the self-assessment computer system.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect on the security of information systems of the EDS-Oracle contract with the Inland Revenue. [1642]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:* I refer to the reply I gave on 13 November to the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) at columns *226–27.*

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assurances he has received from *(a)* EDS and *(b)* Oracle as to the security of information held on the Inland Revenue database when transmitted outside of the United Kingdom. [1643]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:* I refer to the reply I gave on 13 November to the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) at columns *226–27.*

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if subcontractors and contractors otherwise associated with EDS or Oracle will be subject to the same contractual terms as EDS or Oracle themselves in the protection and security of the Inland Revenue database. [1645]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:* Yes.

DEFENCE

Gaul Trawler

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what Royal Navy personnel were present on the trawler, Gaul, during the six months before her disappearance off north cape; and if he will make a statement. [4364]

Mr. Soames: My Department has no record of Royal Navy personnel ever having been aboard the trawler Gaul.

There has for some time been speculation about the loss of the Gaul in February 1974 and allegations that she was involved in intelligence-gathering activities. My Department has no record of the Gaul, under that name or her earlier name, Ranger Castor, ever having been engaged on any task for the Royal Navy, or any evidence to call into doubt the findings of the independent investigation which concluded that she foundered and sank with all hands in heavy seas.

Unfilled Posts

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many billeted posts were unfilled on operational ships of the Royal Navy on the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [3522]

Mr. Soames: This matter is the responsibility of the chief executive of the Naval Manning Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from F. M. Malbon to Mr. Robert Key, dated 19 November 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of unfilled billets on operational ships of the Royal Navy, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Naval Manning Agency.

Currently, 28 RN officer and 560 RN rating billets in operational ships, submarines, front line squadrons and ships' flights are unfilled, representing, respectively, 1.7% and 4.6% of the total of such billets.

The deployment of sufficient suitably skilled and experienced manpower to individual billets and management of a progressive reduction in manpower gapping are prime objectives of the Naval Manning Agency. The Agency's Corporate Plan, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library, states that the NMA will seek to fill more than 93% of total officer billets and 93.5% of total rating/other rank billets in 1996/1997. Priority is given to those ships, submarines, squadrons and units engaged in high priority operations.

I hope this is helpful.

Continued Service Incentives

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by rank and by specialism, the number of posts in the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force, where employment attracts financial incentives to continue in service beyond the contracted dates, including the value of such bounty; and if he will make a statement. [3523]

Mr. Soames: A number of bonuses have been recently introduced to aid retention of personnel in key areas. These bonuses are paid in return either for waiving the right to give notice for a further period, staying until a

pensionable point or completing a commission, or for re-engagement, thereby saving recruitment and training costs. Details of values of these bonuses and numbers are given in the tables, although some will vary from year to year where the bonus is on-going, depending on numbers eligible:

Royal Navy marine engineering mechanics (MEMs)

One-off bonus of either £1,500 or £3,000 to waive the right to give notice to leave the Royal Navy for six or 18 months respectively, to general service and submarine MEMs who have between three and nine years service on 15 September 1996.

Total targeted: 1,276

Predicted take-up: 893

Royal Navy Sea Harrier Pilots (Lieutenant/Lt. Commander) (£10,000 to Sea Harrier pilots who complete a medium career commission, or serve to qualify for a pension on an extended medium career commission or full career commission).

Total targeted 1996–97: 4

Predicted take-up 1996–97: 3

Predicted take-up per annum thereafter: 4

Army re-engagement bounty (Private)

£1,400 to soldiers in Household Cavalry, Royal Armoured Corps, Royal Artillery and Infantry who waive their right to give notice for 12 months.

Total targeted: 2,960

Total accepted, as at 30 June 1996: 2,693

Royal marine re-engagement bounty (all ranks below substantive Corporal)

One-off bounty of £2,000 to Marines in seven shortage categories who had already given notice or were in a position to do so, to waive their right to give notice to leave the Royal Marines for six months.

Total targeted: 1,123

Total accepted: 820

In addition, there is a tri-service committal bonus of £2,000 payable to all ratings/other ranks/airmen/airwomen on completion of 4½ and 7½ years' in the Army, provided that the individual has not given notice to leave at these points.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will publish the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee's report on its first visit to the protection and life sciences division, Porton Down. [3966]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, which was set up in July this year, has now visited all the establishments in the Department which conduct experiments involving animals. The committee intends to submit a report to my Department's chief scientific adviser next month and I would expect publication early in the new year.

State Opening of Parliament

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of military personnel who took part in the state opening of Parliament. [4670]

Mr. Soames: Military personnel are paid on a daily basis irrespective of their duties and their involvement in the state opening of Parliament is not separately costed.

Advanced Strike Technology

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made since the signature last December of the joint advanced strike technology memorandum of understanding with the United States. [5104]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The United States Department of Defence announced on 16 November the selection of two main contractors, Boeing Defense and Aerospace Group and Lockheed Martin, to carry out the concept demonstration phase of the proposed joint strike fighter aircraft programme. The concept demonstration will be carried out against a requirement to whose formulation the UK has contributed. The United kingdom has now arranged to participate in the phase with a view to the possible purchase of the short take-off, vertical landing version of the aircraft as a successor to the Royal Navy's Sea Harrier in the second decade of the next century. The concept demonstration is expected to cost $2.2 billion and will include the construction, by each of the two contractors, of flying demonstration aircraft. The United Kingdom will contribute $200 million to the phase and we expect a significant share of the work to be carried out by British industry.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Health Services (Newry and Mourne)

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total expenditure on *(a)* hospital services and *(b)* social services in each year since 1990 in the Newry and Mourne district; and what is the projected expenditure for each year to 2000. [3962]

Mr. Moss: The information is not available in the exact form requested. The table discloses the total expenditure in the Newry and Mourne district on hospital specialties and personal social services for the years 1992–93 to 1994–95. An analysis of expenditure for 1995–96 is not yet available. However, total expenditure for the year is £40,488,000.

This information has been extracted from supplementary statements produced to provide further analysis of the expenditure disclosed in the annual accounts. The format of these statements was revised in 1992–93. Prior to this, the information requested is not available.

The projected expenditure on hospital services and social services for each year 1996–97 to 1999–2000 is not available.

Newry and Mourne District

Year	*Hospital Specialties*	*Personal Social Services*
1992–93	19,157,679	8,773,605
1993–94	20,114,722	11,651,572
1994–95	20,160,969	13,772,833

The information has been extracted from the analysis of expenditure reported in the FR22 of the Newry and Mourne directly managed unit for each year 1992–93 to 1993–94. For 1994–95 the information has been extracted from the FR22 returns of the Newry and Mourne HSS trust.

Public Order

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have been prosecuted under *(a)* article 7 and *(b)* article 20 of the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order in each year since its enactment. [1071]

Sir John Wheeler: The number of persons proceeded against under articles 7 and 20 of the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987, by year is as follows:

From 27 April 1987: five with obstruction—under article 20(1)

1988: 21 with obstruction—under article 20 (1)

1990: one with obstruction—under article 20(1)

1991: one with endeavouring to break up a lawful procession, under article 7(1)

1995: two with obstruction, under article 20 (1)

Up to 31 July 1996: 16 with obstruction, under article 20(1)

Terrorist Bombs (Compensation)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his policy with respect to seeking compensation from the Irish Republic for damage caused by terrorist bombs manufactured in that state and exploded in the United Kingdom. [2455]

Sir John Wheeler: None.

Students

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has for co–operation between relevant Northern Ireland Office departments in respect of providing accommodation for students. [3586]

Mr. Ancram: None.

Benefits Expenditure

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list public expenditure on benefits for each of the last 10 years *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* as a proportion of total spending for Northern Ireland. [3863]

Mr. Moss: The information requested is given in the table:

Year	*Benefit spend[1] £ million*	*Benefit spend as percentage of total spend*
1985–86	2,001.3	29.24
1986–87	2,108.1	30.17
1987–88	2,103.6	29.51
1988–89	2,058.8	27.28
1989–90	2,044.5	27.59
1990–91	2,076.4	28.95
1991–92	2,229.6	30.25
1992–93	2,425.1	31.33
1993–94	2,632.6	32.49
1994–95	2,773.3	33.30
1995–96[2]	2,896.8	33.78

[1] Figures are at 1996–97 prices.
[2] Estimated figures.

Disabled Access

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the percentage of commercial premises in Northern Ireland which have disabled access. [3837]

Mr. Moss: None.

Small Firms

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of firms in Northern Ireland have fewer than 20 employees. [3838]

Mr. Ancram: There are 18,178 non-agricultural enterprises in the private sector in Northern Ireland which have fewer than 20 employees. This accounts for 87.7 per cent. of the total number of enterprises registered for VAT or PAYE.

Low Pay

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* women and *(b)* men in Northern Ireland earn less than £1.50 per hour. [3847]

Mr. Ancram: The two main sources of earnings information for Northern Ireland are the new earnings survey—NES—and the labour force survey—LFS. Both of these record an insufficient number in the sample earning less than £1.50 per hour to provide a reliable estimate.

Housing Benefit

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were on housing benefit in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years; and at what cost to public funds. [3849]

Mr. Moss: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Housing benefit case load (000s)*	*Cost (£ million)*
1985–86	180.0	108.7
1986–87	186.9	118.0
1987–88	202.4	125.4
1988–89	160.7	126.9
1989–90	164.2	143.5
1990–91	164.2	159.2
1991–92	166.5	170.3
1992–93	166.5	192.1
1993–94	178.5	222.4
1994–95	180.7	251.8
1995–96	182.4	278.6

Homelessness

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many homeless people there are in Northern Ireland; and how many of these are under 18 years of age. [3855]

Mr. Moss: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The chief executive has advised me that it is not possible to give the number of people who are homeless at a particular time. However, information available is as follows:

Year	*Total*[1]	*Under 18*
1995–96	4,319	195
1996–97[2]	2,421	109

[1] Accepted as in priority need and awarded priority status.

[2] From April 1996 to September 1996.

The total number presenting as homeless for 1995–96 was 10,468 and from April to September 1996 was 5,678.

Child Support Agency

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases are currently being administered by the Child Support Agency in Northern Ireland. [3857]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Child Support Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Patrick Devlin. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from P. Devlin to Ms Marjorie Mowlam, dated 13 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your question about the number of cases being administered by the Child Support Agency in Northern Ireland.

In August 1996, the number of cases being administered by the Northern Ireland Child Support agency was 23,042. This is the most recent data available and is a count of all those cases maintained clerically or on the Child Support Computer System which are not classified as being closed.

I hope you find this information useful.

Pension Schemes

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of people in Northern Ireland have been members of *(a)* private pension schemes and *(b)* occupational pension schemes in each of the last 10 years. [3859]

Mr. Moss: The total number of people in private pension schemes and occupational pension schemes in Northern Ireland is not available. However, information on the number of people with an appropriate personal pension—APP—used to contract out of the state scheme, and the number of people paying contracted-out contributions, is available. Data on private pensions or occupational pensions which are not contracted-out are not held by the Department of Social Security.

The information is given in the table:

Year	*APP (thousands)*	*Percentage of workforce*	*Percentage of population*
1984–85	—	—	—
1985–86	—	—	—
1986–87	—	—	—
1987–88	70	10.4	6.2
1989–90	71	10.4	6.2
1990–91	85	12.3	7.4
1991–92	99	14.3	8.6
1992–93	110	15.9	9.6
1993–94	117	16.9	9.9
1994–95	121	17.7	10.2
1995–96	119	17.2	10.0

Year	*Contracted out (thousands)*	*Percentage of workforce*	*Percentage of population*
1984–85	219	—	—
1985–86	218	—	—
1986–87	221	—	—
1987–88	225	—	—
1988–89	251	—	—
1989–90	251	—	—
1990–91	245	—	—
1991–92	240	—	—
1992–93	235	—	—
1993–94	227	—	—
1994–95	225	—	—

Low-income Households

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the percentage of households in Northern Ireland which have net incomes after housing costs of less than half the national average; and how many *(a)* people and *(b)* children are involved. [3861]

Mr. Moss: The percentage of households in Northern Ireland with net income—disposable income—after housing costs below half the United Kingdom average is 31.4.

(a) The percentage of persons in Northern Ireland households with net income after housing costs below half the United Kingdom average is 20.8.

(b) The percentage of children in Northern Ireland households with net income after housing costs below half the United Kingdom average is 18.

Disabled People (Employment)

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what percentage of people in Northern Ireland who are registered disabled are *(a)* currently unemployed and *(b)* long-term unemployed; [3839]

(2) how many people are registered disabled in Northern Ireland. [3846]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Ms Marjorie Mowlam, dated 15 November 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me, as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency, to reply to your questions about Registered Disabled People (RDP) in Northern Ireland.

The total number of Registered Disabled People at 30 September 1996 was 9,340. Of these, 2,080 are actively seeking employment with help from the Training & Employment Agency's Disablement Advisory Service. The balance of 7,260 RDP are either in employment or are not currently seeking employment for reasons which include illness or a deterioration in their condition which precludes them, at least in the short-term, from the labour market.

Of the active jobseekers 1,400 are long-term unemployed, ie they have been unemployed for 12 months or more.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Family Credit

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people in work in Northern Ireland received the family credit allowance; at what cost to public funds; and what proportion of total social security spending this constituted for each of the last 10 years. [3840]

Mr. Moss: The information requested is as follows:

Year	Family credit recipients[1]	Cost £ million	Proportion of total social security spending Per cent.
1985–86	15,006	11.8	0.96
1986–87	14,744	13.7	1.03
1987–88	14,825	13.9	0.99
1988–89	14,839	28.0	1.91
1989–90	14,908	29.1	1.87
1990–91	14,500	31.5	1.84
1991–92	13,801	37.2	1.91
1992–93	15,819	47.8	2.16
1993—94	18,555	56.5	2.29
1994–95	22,052	62.1	2.34
1995–96	23,668	71.0	2.51

[1] Figures taken at April of each year.

Means-tested Benefits

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the percentage of the population of Northern Ireland on means-tested benefit in each of the last 10 years. [3862]

Mr. Moss: The means-tested benefits are as follows:

income support

family credit

housing benefit

These benefits are paid to benefit units. A benefit unit is a single person or a couple, with or without children. As these statistics are for benefit units, it is not appropriate to use the population of Northern Ireland as the denominator. The number in receipt of the benefits is as follows:

Year	Income support[1]	Family credit[2]	Housing benefit[3]
1987	190,780	14,825	202,400
1988	183,715	14,839	160,000
1989	182,235	14,908	164,200
1990	188,643	14,500	164,200
1991	196,342	13,801	166,500
1992	204,940	15,819	166,500
1993	215,365	18,555	178,500
1994	222,621	22,052	180,700
1995	226,251	23,668	182,400
1996	229,461	24,995	186,700

[1] Data at May each year.
[2] Data at April each year.
[3] Average number receiving at any time.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of pensioners in Northern Ireland rely solely on means-tested benefits. [3860]

Mr. Moss: This information is not available in the form requested.

Uninhabited Housing

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* publicly owned houses and *(b)* privately owned houses in Northern Ireland he estimates are currently uninhabited. [3848]

Mr. Moss: The latest figures available are at 31 December 1995 and are as follows:

Public sector: 5,123

Private sector: 27,921

Total: 33,044

Construction Industry

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of people employed in the construction industry in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years. [3852]

Mr. Moss: Northern Ireland employees in employment in the construction industry at June of each year are as follows:

Year	Employees in employment
1986	26,370
1987	27,600
1988	28,180
1989	27,910
1990	28,760
1991	27,120
1992	26,000
1993	25,030
1994	23,550
1995	23,370
1996	22,430

Note:
Figures round to the nearest 10.
Source:
Quarterly Employment Survey.

Private Tenants

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of those receiving housing benefit in Northern Ireland are tenants of private landlords. [3850]

Mr. Moss: The latest figures available are for March 1996, when 17.5 per cent. of people in Northern Ireland receiving housing benefit were tenants of private landlords.

Public Housing

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many publicly owned houses have been built in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years. [3851]

Mr. Moss: The information is provided in the table.

New build completions by Northern Ireland Housing Executive 1986 to 1995

	New built completions
1986	2,222
1987	1,805
1988	1,653
1989	1,577
1990	1,324
1991	961
1992	958
1993	888
1994	878
1995	1,362

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the total amount spent on the (i) building and (ii) maintenance of publicly owned housing in each of the last 10 years *(a)* in real terms, *(b)* as a proportion of the housing budget and *(c)* as a proportion of the total budget for Northern Ireland. [3854]

Mr. Moss: The information is provided in the table.

New housebuilding and maintenance by Northern Ireland housing executive 1986–87 to 1995–96

Northern Ireland housing executive expenditure

	1986–87	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
New housebuilding										
Cash	63.9	56.6	55.9	51.3	39.0	40.3	34.9	35.4	35.6	48.5
1995–96 prices	98.6	82.9	76.8	65.9	46.3	45.0	37.6	36.9	36.5	48.5
Maintenance										
Cash	58.4	63.4	64.7	70.1	78.9	79.5	85.9	86.8	99.5	101.8
1995–96 prices	90.1	92.9	88.8	90.0	93.7	88.8	92.4	90.5	101.9	101.8
Total NI housing budget (cash)	535.7	545.6	557.7	516.3	511.4	536.3	551.6	558.9	573.7	602.8
Public expenditure NI block (cash)	4,499.0	4,828.0	5,111.0	5,395.0	5,525.0	6,018.0	6,580.0	7,085.0	7,407.0	7,823.0

Percentage

	1986–87	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Newbuild expenditure (cash) as percentage of total NI housing budget	11.9	10.4	10.0	9.9	7.6	7.5	6.3	6.3	6.2	8.0
Newbuild expenditure (cash) as percentage of PE NI block	1.4	1.2	1.1	1.0	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.6
Maintenance expenditure (cash) as a percentage of total NI housing budget	10.9	11.6	11.6	13.6	15.4	14.8	15.6	15.5	17.3	16.9
Maintenance expenditure (cash) as a percentage of PE NI block	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.3

Negative Equity

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many homes in Northern Ireland are affected by negative equity. [3856]

Mr. Moss: I am advised by the lending institutions that there is no reported negative equity in Northern Ireland.

Benefit Fraud

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of cases of benefit fraud discovered in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years, indicating the estimated cost of these cases. [3858]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alec Wylie, and I have asked him to arrange for a response to be given.

Letter from Jim Fleming to Ms Marjorie Mowlam, dated 14 November 1996:

As Mr. Wylie, Chief Executive of the Social Security Agency is absent at present, I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question on benefit fraud.

You have asked for the number of cases of benefit fraud that have been discovered in the last ten years and also an indication of the estimated costs of these cases.

The potential cost to the Exchequer if these cases had not been detected is referred to as estimated benefit savings and details are set out on the attached table for the past nine financial years. Information is not available for 1986/87.

No records have been maintained on the cost of investigating each case.

I hope this explains the position for you but I would be happy to provide any further information you require.

Number of benefit fraud cases detected and the estimated benefit savings

Year	*Number of cases of benefit fraud detected*	*Estimated benefit savings £ million*
1987–88	2,625	3.6
1988–89	2,852	3.7
1989–90	3,820	4.6
1990–91	5,897	9.46
1991–92	6,567	10.4
1992–93	6,580	10.56
1993–94	7,260	11.57
1994–95	6,990	11.61
1995–96	5,179	15.62

Prisoners (Compassionate Temporary Release Scheme)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to announce the outcome of the review of the compassionate temporary release scheme for prisoners; and if he will make a statement. [3827]

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Prison Service under its chief executive, Mr. Alan Shannon. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alan Shannon to Mr. Alfred Morris, dated 19 November 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to the Parliamentary Question that you asked about the review of the Compassionate Temporary Release Scheme.

The Prison Service has now completed its review of policy in relation to unescorted temporary release. We have concluded that Liam Hefferman's failure to return from leave was an individual action which does not in itself have implications for the behaviour of other prisoners who might apply for temporary release. We will therefore continue to operate a policy under which prisoners may be granted unescorted leave. However, we will continue to consider applications very carefully and they will be refused if it is felt that there is a significant risk of absconding or danger to the prisoner or the public. As an additional safeguard, we have put in place new arrangements that will ensure that certain sensitive cases, including the cases of prisoners applying for leave outside Northern Ireland, will be scrutinised by a more senior official in Prison Service Headquarters.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Sawn Wood Imports

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what quantities of sawn wood were imported into the United Kingdom in the past year from the 10 countries which are the principal exporters of sawn wood to the United Kingdom. [4485]

Mr. Lang: UK imports of sawn wood[1] in 1995 are given in the table:

	Thousand metric tonnes
Sweden	841
Canada	360
Finland	343
Latvia	343
Russia	263
Portugal	155
USA	89
Irish Republic	73
Estonia	61
Brazil	56
World	3,040

[1] Sawn wood is defined by headings 248.2 and 248.4 of the Standard International Trade Classification, revision 3.

EU Working Time Directive

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the representations received on the working time directive. [4279]

Mr. Lang: My Department has received a wide range of representations about the working time directive. Many of these have been from employers or employer organisations concerned about the directive's potential implications for industry.

Royal Observatories

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much has been spent to date on preparing for the bidding process for the royal observatories; and from which budget these sums were paid. [4569]

Mr. Ian Taylor: A total of £495,000 has been spent to 31 October 1996 on implementing the recommendations of the prior options review of the royal observatories. This has been paid from the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council's allocation from the science budget.

Nanotechnology

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the report of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology on the level of Government support for nanotechnology; and if he will make a statement. [4566]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have carefully considered this report which recognises the long-term public support for nanotechnology provided by both the research councils and by my Department. At least two new projects relevant to nanotechnology have recently been introduced through the foresight programme, including a national centre for microelectronics. Developments in nanotechnology have potential applications in many other generic priorities identified by foresight.

Environmental Auditing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the ways in which his Department has *(a)* demonstrated by example and *(b)* promoted externally, the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing; and if he will make a statement. [4532]

Mr. Page: My Department has taken significant steps to improve its own environmental performance. It reduced energy costs by 14.13 per cent. in the five years to March 1996 and is preparing new targets for reducing both energy usage and waste. In keeping with the commitment in the 1990 White Paper "This Common Inheritance", the Department undertook a review of its own environment management capabilities. Work has started on implementing potential improvements identified. Advice has been given to line management to ensure that the environment has been taken into account in policy formulation. Two examples of this in practice will feature in "Case studies of environmental appraisal of policies in Government Departments", scheduled to be published in the new year.

My Department has encouraged UK business to adopt positive environment management, which includes the audit of environmental performance, as a way to deal with the environment as a strategic business issue. To this end, the Department commissioned the United Kingdom Accreditation Service to create an accreditation system to allow accredited certificates to be issued against BS 7750, and latterly, ISO 14001.

Small Businesses

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he proposes to take in order to improve the participation of representatives of small business in committees of inquiry, advisory bodies and non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible. [4384]

Mr. Page: In making appointments to executive non-departmental public bodies, my Department complies with the guidance issued by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments Central to this guidance is the overriding principle of selection based on merit.

Appointments to advisory and other bodies are not formally required to comply with the OCPA guidance; however, the Department takes the commissioner's guidance into account in all its appointments, including the principle of appointment on merit.

Where appropriate, we aim to ensure that representation on public bodies is well balanced. It is of course possible for anyone to put forward nominations for public appointments, including themselves.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the number of defaults since the beginning of the small firms loan guarantee scheme by the size of loan. [4386]

Mr. Page: Information is not available on loans prior to April 1988. Since that date, of the 35,574 loans guaranteed the following number have defaulted:

Loans up to £30,000: 7,159

Loans above £30,00 and up to £100,000: 2,632

Loans above £100,000: 140

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many specialist lenders in the technology sector have been added to the loan guarantee scheme's list of approved lenders since his Department's review earlier this year. [4385]

Mr. Page: None. The criteria for potential lenders is currently being formulated.

Medical Research

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much was spent on research into *(a)* Alzheimer's disease, *(b)* cancer, *(c)* stroke, *(d)* heart disease and *(e)* HIV-AIDS in each financial year since 1989 in constant prices; and if he will make a statement. [1398]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 6 November 1996]:* All the data provided are in 1995–96 prices.

Data on Government funding of HIV-AIDS research are collected centrally by the Department of Health. Funding from 1989–90 is summarised in the table:

£ million

	HIV-AIDS
1995–96	n/a
1994–95	23.2
1993–94	22.7
1992–93	21.5
1991–92	22.8
1990–91	21.9
1989–90	17.3

Research funding from the Medical Research Council for the other areas between 1989–90 and 1995–96 is summarised in table:

£ million

	Alzheimer's disease[1]	*Cancer*	*Stroke*	*Heart disease*
1995–96 (where available)[2]	1.97	n/a	n/a	n/a
1994–95[2]	1.40	13.5	3.5	11.7
1993–94[3]	n/a	13.9	0.9	6.4
1992–93[3]	n/a	14.5	1.1	5.8
1991–92[3]	n/a	15.2	0.7	5.9
1990–91[3]	n/a	16.1	0.5	7.0
1989–90[3]	n/a	17.1	0.5	7.1

[1] Data earlier than 1994–95 are not readily available.
[2] Figures using previous definitions of research areas.
[3] Figures using current definitions of research areas.

The Scottish Office's expenditure on the other areas is as follows:

	Alzheimer's disease £	*Cancer* £	*Stroke* £	*Heart disease* £
1995–96	52,124	433,447	134,068	148,647
1994–95	53,070	781,171	118,061	260,216
1993–94	70,448	1,004,889	147,865	376,769
1992–93	58,280	487,314	69,666	317,441
1991–92	36,720	202,408	101,339	156,466
1990–91	66,187	98,179	8,215	28,941
1989–90	41,733	273,342	102,698	92,853

Department of Health/national health service expenditure, including England and Wales, on the other areas is summarised as follows:

	Alzheimer's disease[2] £	*Cancer* £	*Stroke and heart disease* £
1995–96[1]	91,000	7,438,000	3,580,000
1994–95	154,653	7,353,694	1,699,134
1993–94	148,037	7,671,858	468,648
1992–93	82,579	7,623,011	269,186
1991–92	83,819	7,968,350	251,456
1990–91	108,215	7,402,607	309,185
1989–90	0	7,694,481	333,873

[1] Estimated figures.
[2] NHS figures are not available.

The Northern Ireland Office does not hold the information in the form requested and it could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

When inspecting these data on the funding of research, it is important to bear in mind the way different research areas support each other—many diseases and conditions are multi-factorial. For example, if we consider the Medical Research Council's portfolio, cancer studies are underpinned by a significant amount of basic research in other areas—for example, the genetic blueprint and health, some £37 million; molecules and cells, £65 million, infections and immunity, £60 million; and some of the more basic research into HIV-AIDS has added enormously to our understanding of viral disease in general.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to implement fully the decision of the European Court of Justice on the working time directive. [4293]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 November 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the statement that I made to the House on Tuesday 12 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *155*.

Defence-related Trade

Ms Quin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many times the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939 has been used by the Government in each of the past four years; and for what purposes. [3715]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* Since November 1992, 16 orders have been made under the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939 as amended by the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1990. The Export of Goods (Control) Order 1992, S.I. No. 3092, replaced the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1991 as amended. The 1992 order was subsequently amended by the following statutory instruments: 1992 No. 3305, 1993 No. 1020, 1993 No. 1692, 1993 No. 1825, 1993 No. 2515, 1993 No. 3264 and 1994 No. 534. The Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, S.I. No. 1191, revoked all of the 1992 order, as amended, save that part applying to the exportation of antiques. The Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 has been amended by the following statutory instruments: 1994 No. 1632, 1994 No. 2518, 1994 No. 2711, 1995 No. 3060, 1995 No. 3249, 1996 No. 1341 and 1996 No. 2663. The purpose of each of the orders listed is given in the explanatory notes accompanying each statutory instrument.

Research Centres

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what investigations, as part of the prior options review, are being undertaken of the ownership of *(a)* the Horticulture Research Centre, *(b)* the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute, *(c)* the Scottish Crop Research Institute, *(d)* the Institute of Arable Crops Research, *(e)* the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research, *(f)* the John Innes Centre and *(g)* the Silsoe Research Institute; and if he will name the owners of the land and buildings occupied by these institutes. [4740]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* The prior options review process, as set out in the guidelines placed in the Library on 26 January, *Official Report*, column *422*, looks at a wide range of options for institutes, including change of ownership. This might take the form of, for example, transferring ownership to a university or other independent organisation, or privatisation as a company limited by guarantee.

As for current ownership of the land and buildings of the institutes in question, I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 18 July, *Official Report*, column *616*, for details of the last four. Horticulture Research International operates from six sites, four of which are owned by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, one by the East Malling Trust for Horticultural Research, and one by Wye college, university of London. The details of the two institutes in Scotland are:

Location (unit, farm etc.)	*Owner of land and buildings*
The Macaulay Land Use Research Institute	
Cragiebuckler	MLURI
Hill of Mackalea, Glenlivet	Crown Estate Commissioners
Glensaugh	Secretary of State for Scotland
Sourhope	First Roxburgh Bahamian Trust
Auchope	Mrs. J. Clarke
Hartwood	Secretary of State for Scotland
Red Deer Farm, Glensaugh	Secretary of State for Scotland and the Forestry Commission and Fasque Estates
Kingseat of Outh	Forestry Commission
The Scottish Crop Research Institute	
Mylnefield/Bullionfield	Secretary of State for Scotland
Gourdie	Secretary of State for Scotland
Liff Hospital Gardens	Secretary of State for Scotland
Lonsdale	SCRI
East Pilmore Holding	Secretary of State for Scotland
Carslea, Station Crescent	Four private individuals
Blythbank	Roslin Institute

Major General Prabowo

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to meet Major General Prabowo during his forthcoming visit to Britain. [4699]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* I have no plans to meet Major General Prabowo during his private visit to the UK. The Minister of State, Foreign and

Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), did, however, meet him on 12 November to thank him on behalf of the British Government for securing the safe release in May of the British hostages in Irian Jaya.

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in which years since 1979 national insurance contribution rates were changed; and what was *(a)* the total effect on revenue on each change and *(b)* the cumulative effect on total contribution income from all the changes over the period from 1979 to 1995–96. [3046]

Mr. Heald: Information in respect of employee and employer class 1 national insurance contributions and self-employed class 4 profits-related national insurance contributions is in the tables. If the contribution structure, rates and level of contracted-out rebates in force in 1979–80 had applied in 1995–96, employees would have paid about £5.3 billion less and employers would have paid about £5.6 billion more in national insurance contributions and surcharge for that year. If the class 4 contribution rate in force in 1979–80 had applied in 1995–96, the self-employed would have paid about £0.3 billion less in national insurance contributions for that year.

The self-employed class 2 flat-rate national insurance contribution has generally increased in line with the increase in prices. Apart from a £1.25 a week reduction made in October 1985, the class 2 rate rose gradually from £2.10 in 1979–80 to £5.75 in 1995–96. Thus, the financial effect has been relatively small. The financial effect for the voluntary class 3 national insurance contribution, which is set at 10p less than the class 2 contribution, is similarly small.

Class 1A national insurance contributions for company cars and car fuel were introduced at a rate of 10.4 per cent. in 1991–92 and raised £470 million in the first year of collection. The reduction in the rate of 0.2 per cent. from April 1994 reduced revenue by some £9 million.

Table A

Year	*Employee class 1[1] National Insurance rates (percentage)*	*Estimated change in[2] contribution revenue (£ million)*
1979–80	6.5	—
1980–81	6.75	[3]+225
1981–82	7.75	[3]+1,020
1982–83	8.75	[3]+1,096
1983–84	9	[3]+285
1984–85	9	—
1985–86	9 (9, 7, 5 from October)	[4]–100
1986–87	9, 7, 5	—
1987–88	9, 7, 5	—
1988–89	9, 7, 5	—
1989–90	9, 7, 5 (2 + 9 from October)	[5]–1,000
1990–91	2 + 9	—
1991–92	2 + 9	—
1992–93	2 + 9	—
1993–94	2 + 9	—
1994–95	2 + 10	[3]+1,914
1995–96	2 + 10	—

Notes:

[1] Not contracted-out rates shown. The level of contracted-out rebate for the period shown was:
2.5 per cent.—1979–80 to 1982–83; 2.15 per cent.—1983–84 to 1987–88; 2.0 per cent.—1988–89 to 1992–93; 1.8 per cent.—1993–94 to 1995–96.

[2] Figures show the cash change in revenue for the tax year in which the change in contribution rate was made.

[3] Estimates taken from Government Actuary reports on the various Contributions Re-Rating Orders and Social Security (Contributions) Bills which introduced the changes in contribution rates.

[4] Reduced rates for employees were introduced from October 1985. Estimate taken from the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1985–86 and relates to part year only.

[5] Revised structure applied from October 1989. Estimate given in the *Official Report*, 24 April 1989, column *670* and relates to part year only.

Source:
Government Actuary's Department.

Table B

Year	*Employer class 1[1] National Insurance rates (percentage)*	*Estimated change in contribution[3] revenue (excluding effect of National Insurance Surcharge) (£ million)*
1979–80	[2]10 + 3.5	—
1880–81	[2]10.2 + 3.5	[4]+248
1981–82	[2] 10.2 + 3.5	—
1982–83	[2]10.2 + 3.5/2	—
1983–84	[2]10.45 + 1.5/1	[4]+309
1984–85	[2]10.45 + 1 nil	—
1985–86	10.45 (10.45, 9, 7 from October)	[5]–30
1986–87	10.45, 9, 7, 5	—
1987–88	10.45, 9, 7, 5	—
1988–89	10.45, 9, 7, 5	—
1989–90	10.45, 9, 7, 5	—
1990–91	10.45, 9, 7, 5	—
1991–92	10.4, 8.6, 6.6, 4.6	[4]–290
1992–93	10.4, 8.6, 6.6, 4.6	—
1993–94	10.4, 8.6, 6.6, 4.6	—
1994–95	10.2, 7.6, 5.6, 3.6	[4]–909
1995–96	10.2, 7, 5, 3	[4]–254

Notes:

[1] Not contracted-out rates shown. The level of contracted-out rebate for the period shown was:
4.5 per cent.—1979–80 to 1982–83; 4.1 per cent.—1983–84 to 1987–88; 3.8 per cent.—1988–89 to 1992–93; 3.0 per cent.—1993–94 to 1995–96.

[2] National insurance surcharge.

[3] Figures show the cash change in revenue for the tax year in which the change in contribution rate was made. The rate of national insurance surcharge was 3.5 per cent. between 1979–80 and 1981–82. In 1981–82 the surcharge raised about £3.65 billion. Thereafter, the rate of surcharge was gradually reduced until its abolition in October 1984. The financial effect of the surcharge is not included in the table.

[4] Estimates taken from Government Actuary reports on the various Contributions Re-Rating Orders and Social Security (Contributions) Bills which introduced the changes in contribution rates.

[5] The upper earnings limit for employers' contributions was abolished and reduced rates for employers of the lower paid were introduced from October 1985. Estimate taken from the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1985–86 and relates to part year only.

Source:
Government Actuary's Department.

Table C

Year	*Self-employed class 4 National Insurance rates (percentage)*	*Estimated change in[1] contribution revenue (£ million)*
1979–80	5	—
1980–81	5	—
1981–82	5.75	[2]+21
1982–83	6	[2]+10
1983–84	6.3	[2]+12

Table C

Year	*Self-employed class 4 National Insurance rates (percentage)*	*Estimated change in[1] contribution revenue (£ million)*
1984–85	6.3	—
1985–86	6.3	—
1986–87	6.3	—
1987–88	6.3	—
1988–89	6.3	—
1989–90	6.3	—
1990–91	6.3	—
1991–92	6.3	—
1992–93	6.3	—
1993–94	6.3	—
1994–95	7.3	[2]+117
1995–96	7.3	—

Notes:

[1] Figures show the change in revenue for the tax year in which the change in contribution rate was made.

[2] Estimates taken from Government Actuary reports on the various Contributions Re-Rating Orders and Social Security (Contributions) Bills which introduced the changes in contribution rates.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Elderly People (Income Support)

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of the elderly population in each of the member countries of the European Union receives (i) all and (ii) part of their income from means-tested social assistance and income support schemes. [3048]

Mr. Heald: Such information as is available is contained in table 2.8 at page 42 of "Social Assistance in OECD Countries: Synthesis Report"—York university, 1996, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Benefits Agency (Seaham and Peterlee)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many staff were employed in the Seaham and Peterlee Benefits Agency offices in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994, *(c)* 1995 and *(d)* at the latest available date. [3387]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John Cummings, dated 18 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many staff were employed in the Seaham and Peterlee Benefits Agency offices in (a) 1993, (b) 1994, (c) 1995 and (d) at the latest available date.

The information requested is shown in the table below and is based on the position at the dates shown.

	Peterlee	*Seaham*
1 April 1993	111.0	47.0
1 April 1994	111.4	45.0
1 April 1995	104.5	44
1 April 1996	92.0	37.0
1 November 1996	92.0	37.0

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many claimants entitled to invalid care allowance currently receive payment of the invalid care allowance *(a)* in Lancashire and *(b)* in the United Kingdom; [3793]

(2) how many claimants entitled to invalid care allowance have an underlying entitlement and receive no payment of invalid care allowance *(a)* in Lancashire and *(b)* in the United Kingdom; [3794]

(3) how many claimants of invalid care allowance are currently entitled to invalid care allowance *(a)* in Lancashire and *(b)* in the United Kingdom. [3792]

Mr. Burt: As of 11 November 1996, 353,580 people in Great Britain were entitled to payment of invalid care allowance. It is estimated that less than 0.1 per cent. of these have had payment of their benefit suspended while changes of circumstances, which may affect entitlement, are investigated. Figures for Lancashire are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Information on underlying entitlement for claimants in Great Britain and in Lancashire is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Responsibility for social security matters in Northern Ireland with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Child Support Agency

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security from which bodies the Child Support Agency is seeking the address of Mr. X, whose name has been sent him. [4205]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The sources the agency can use in seeking to establish the addresses of clients are governed by child support legislation. Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive, will write separately to the hon. Member with details of this case.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to review the jobseeker's allowance. [4473]

Mr. Roger Evans: We have no plans to review the jobseeker's allowance. However, we have in place a long-term programme of monitoring and evaluation to measure whether jobseeker's allowance is achieving its policy objectives. The Benefits Agency and Employment Service have set up an extensive monitoring programme to assess implementation and performance of the new allowance with frequent reports to managers.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the procedures for determining whether an individual is capable of work under the jobseeker's allowance; and what account is taken of the local general practitioner's opinion. [4474]

Mr. Evans: Where there are doubts about a person's capacity for work under jobseeker's allowance, the case is referred to the adjudication officer. Whether a person is capable or incapable of work is determined under the

same provisions that apply to incapacity benefit. A medical certificate issued by a person's own general practitioner is normally accepted as evidence of incapacity until such time as an assessment has been made under the all work incapacity test.

Under the short-term sickness provision in jobseeker's allowance, a person may be treated as capable of work for up to two weeks on two occasions in any one jobseeking period or in each 12 months where the jobseeking period lasts 12 months or more. A general practitioner's statement is not required for the purpose of determining whether these provisions apply.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to review the appeals procedure in respect of the jobseeker's allowance. [4475]

Mr. Evans: Full details of the Government's proposals for new appeals arrangements are set out in the Green Paper, "Improving decision making and appeals in Social Security", Cm 3328 which was published on July 23. The proposals cover all social security benefits including jobseeker's allowance, child support maintenance, war pensions and Contributions Agency rulings.

The consultation period ended on 18 October, and the responses received are currently being independently analysed. We plan to publish the results of the consultation exercise early in the new year, and I will ensure that a copy is placed in the Library. Final decisions on the best way forward will be taken in the light of all the representations received.

Appeals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will place in the Library a draft of the form which benefit claimants have been required to use for lodging appeals since 21 October; and when the form itself will be available; [4799]

(2) what instructions he has issued to ensure that benefit appeals which do not comply with the requirement to use an approved form because the form is not yet available are admitted for hearing by tribunals; [4800]

(3) by what means he will monitor the effects of the benefit regulations which came into force on 21 October, with particular reference to *(a)* the number of oral hearings, and *(b)* the outcome of appeals to (i) social security, (ii) disability, (iii) medical and (iv) child support appeal tribunals. [4802]

Mr. Roger Evans: A copy of the new version of leaflet NI 246 "How to Appeal", including the form for appeal, has today been placed in the Library. This version replaces the April 1996 version, a copy of which was previously placed in the Library. Distribution of the new version to all Benefits Agency and Employment Service offices has now commenced and is scheduled for completion by the end of this week.

All Benefits Agency and independent tribunal service offices have clear guidance that all appeals lodged by letter or on the old print of the appeal form are acceptable, so long as they contain the information required. If sufficient information is not provided, the independent tribunal service will write to the appellant for the missing information. In these cases, the time limit for appealing may be extended by up to 14 days. After the new form is available, any appeal lodged in the form of a letter will still be acceptable, with the same proviso as above, as the regulations make clear.

The effects of the new regulations will be monitored. This will include using existing statistical information collected regularly on the outcome of appeals, by benefit, broken down between: hearings attended by the appellant and/or his representative and hearings not attended by either. This information will be based, of course, only on those appeals which proceed to a hearing; excluded will be appeals which are superseded or withdrawn, struck out or ruled out of jurisdiction.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many income support appeals were heard by social security appeal tribunals in each of the last four quarters for which information is available; how many and what percentage were decided in the appellant's favour where the appellant *(a)* attended the hearing but was not represented, *(b)* was represented but did not attend, *(c)* attended and was represented and *(d)* did not attend and was not represented. [4801]

Mr. Evans: The information requested is contained in the table.

Income support appeals

	March 1995	*June 1995*	*September 1995*	*December 1995*
Total number heard and decided	11,674	9,583	10,720	5,920
Total number decided in appellants favour and percentage	6,033 (51)	3,777 (39)	3,841 (35)	3,057 (51)
Decision in appellants favour: appellant only attended				
Number decided	1,159	1,328	1,424	1,170
Percentage success	43	45	43	43
Decision in appellants favour: representative only attended				
Number decided	1,983	480	257	209
Percentage success	78	66	49	48
Decision in appellants favour: appellant and representative attended				
Number decided	1,456	1,473	1,533	1,156
Percentage success	68	65	65	63

Income support appeals

	March 1995	*June 1995*	*September 1995*	*December 1995*
Decision in appellants favour: no attendance				
Number decided	1,435	496	627	522
Percentage success	32	13	13	14

Source:
"Quarterly Social Security Appeal Tribunal Statistics" published by analytical services division.

Unemployment Benefit Claimants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in each month since April 1996 have signed on and received unemployment benefit when they had a working partner who was working 16 hours or more a week. [4911]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information requested is not available.

HEALTH

Medical Research Council

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many research projects were refused funding by the Medical Research Council in each of the last three years. [3064]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

The number of research projects declined by the Medical Research Council in each of the past three years is as follows:

Year (academic)	*Declined*
1993–94	1,085
1994–95	1,224
1995–96	1,282

The MRC's mission is to support high-quality research, and applications are rejected because they are not rated and ranked sufficiently highly to succeed in the competition for funds.

Rikki Neave Case

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects his special inspectors to complete their investigation of Cambridgeshire social services and the case of Rikki Neave; and if he will make a statement. [4197]

Mr. Burns: We take very seriously the evidence of management failings and poor practice by Cambridgeshire social services department which have come to light in the Rikki Neave case. I have therefore asked the social services inspectorate to conduct an inspection of child protection services in Cambridgeshire next spring, following completion of the independent audit of child protection practice already commissioned by Cambridgeshire. Inspections are normally completed within three weeks of their start date, and I shall take a keen interest in the team's findings.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to issue interim guidance to social services departments to prevent a repetition of cases similar to that involving Rikki Neave; and if he will make a statement. [4198]

Mr. Burns: The Children Act 1989 provides a clear statutory framework within which local authorities must work to protect children from abuse. Section 31 sets out the circumstances in which authorities may apply for care orders or supervision orders if they are satisfied that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. "Working Together Under The Children Act 1989", the Government's guide to inter-agency co-operation for the protection of children from abuse, provides clear and detailed guidance on the handling of cases of child abuse. It emphasises the importance for all agencies of taking decisive action when this is clearly indicated to protect children at risk of significant harm. We see no need to supplement "Working Together" with interim guidance at this stage.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how often approval has been sought from his Department for the closure of accident and emergency departments in the past 12 months; and if he will indicate in each case if the closure was subject to prior consultation. [3892]

Mr. Horam: Consultation is required by law on any substantial change in services proposed by a health authority. If the local community health council contests the proposals they are automatically referred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health for a decision. One proposal substantitally to change an accident and emergency service has been referred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in the last 12 months.

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria govern the recommended distance between *(a)* minor accident treatment service units and *(b)* accident and emergency departments. [3893]

Mr. Horam: The distance between these facilities will vary according to local conditions. Health authorities are responsible for determining what is needed in their area.

Mentally Ill Patients (Deaths)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department has issued to health authorities and NHS trusts on the burial to mentally ill patients who have died in their care. [3931]

Mr. Horam: The Department issued guidance entitled "Patients who die in hospital" to health authorities and NHS trusts in January 1992, copies of which are available

in the Library. This guidance includes a section on funerals for those who die in hospital where no arrangements are made by relatives.

Dental Services

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dental inspections were undertaken by the community dental service from 1990 to the latest available date in each school, including special schools, within the Sunderland health authority area. [4418]

Mr. Malone: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the savings in dental health costs to Sunderland health authority resulting from artificial fluoridation of public water supplies for the five years after the implementation of the proposed scheme. [4416]

Mr. Malone: Studies have consistently shown that the prevalence of dental decay in fluoridated areas is between one third to one half lower than in comparable non–fluoridated water areas. Cost savings can be expected from reductions in the need for dental treatment in fluoridated areas.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many confirmed human cases of tuberculosis have been reported in each month since 1978; and if he will make a statement; [4489]

(2) if he will list the annual percentage of confirmed human cases of tuberculosis reported for each year since 1978, by region; [4712]

(3) what was the percentage of children *(a)* vaccinated and *(b)* unvaccinated against tuberculosis in each year since 1978 by region. [4726]

Mr. Horam: Information is not held centrally in the forms requested. The number of notifications of tuberculosis to the Office for National Statistics, and formerly the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, are published by local authority in the publications "MB2 Communicable Disease Statistics," annually, and "MB2 Infectious Disease Statistics", quarterly. Numbers of tuberculin skin tests by age and result and BCG vaccination by age are given in the Department of Health's publication, "Vaccination and immunisation, summary information, England". Information in this form has been published annually since 1988. Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to undertake a programme of vaccination promotion for tuberculosis; and what assessment he has made of the benefits of such a programme. [4463]

Mr. Horam: The Government recommend that Bacillus Calmette-Guérin vaccine to protect against tuberculosis should be routinely offered to all school children the ages of 10 and 14 years. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, which advises the United Kingdom health departments on immunisation, reviewed this recommendation and advised that the schools immunisation programme should continue. Ministers have endorsed this and health authorities were advised of the result of the review in July 1996. In addition, immunisation continues to be offered to certain high-risk groups outside the routine school programme, including babies born to parents from countries with a high prevalence of tuberculosis.

The Health Education Authority published an information leaflet for parents about BCG immunisation for schoolchildren last year. This is currently being revised and will be qualitatively evaluated later this year. The Department of Health is also funding a pilot project to provide appropriate and non-intimidating information about tuberculosis for asylum seekers and refugees. The BCG programme has been a main plank of the UK's successful tuberculosis control programme.

Ambulance Service

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the level of funding of the ambulance service and about its response times. [4420]

Mr. Horam: Expenditure on ambulance services in England rose by 8 per cent. in real terms between 1991–92 and 1994–95, to a total of £533 million.

In 1995–96 ambulances responded to more than 2.6 million emergency calls within the patients charter target times, compared with some 2 million in 1992–93.

Superannuation (Nurses)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he expects to announce his decision on whether practice nurses can re-enter the NHS superannuation scheme; and if he will make a statement; [4259]

(2) if he will undertake an actuarial study of the cost of allowing general practice nurses to re-enter the NHS superannuation scheme; and if he will make a statement. [4400]

Mr. Malone: We are currently considering the case for allowing general practitioners' practice staff to enter the national health service pension scheme and will announce our conclusions as soon as possible.

Alcohol

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* people and *(b)* children under the age of 18 years have been diagnosed as alcoholics in England in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [4413]

Mr. Burns: I refer the hon. Member to the replies that I gave to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) on 7 November, *Official Report*, columns *627–28*.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the connection between drinking at an early age and alcohol-related problems in later life. [4409]

Mr. Burns: None. However, the Department is commissioning work to produce estimates of alcohol-related mortality, which will form a basis from which estimates of life years lost due to alcohol-related illness could be made.

Medicines (Cost)

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to reduce the time taken to reimburse pharmacists for the cost of medicines, to bring them into line with the repayment scale demanded by medicine wholesalers. [4504]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) on 12 December 1995 at column *580*.

Barnet General Hospital

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total sum spent by the Wellhouse Trust on consultancy fees relating to the private finance initiative for the rebuilding of Barnet general hospital, phase Ib. [3218]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not held centrally.

Asylum Seekers

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to assist local authorities in the funding of the cost of asylum seekers. [3122]

Mr. Burns: The Department of Health has established special grants to assist local authorities in supporting (i) children and their families, and (ii) unaccompanied children. Officials from relevant Government Departments are also working with the local authorities most concerned to assess the scale of the problem of adult asylum seekers.

NHS Facilities (Repair and Maintenance Backlog)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the outstanding repair and maintenance backlog at NHS facilities by regional health authority for each year since 1988. [4300]

Mr. Horam: The outstanding repair and maintenance backlog by regional health authority is shown in the table. The information is available only from 1989–90.

The figures include estimated costs for maintenance on all properties in the NHS due to be replaced, not used for patient care, awaiting planned preventive maintenance and awaiting disposal. They also include an element for meeting statutory and safety standards.

Backlog maintenance estimates (£000s) by region 1989–90 to 1992–93

Region	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*
Northern	98,766	97,109	138,672	142,129
Yorkshire	122,422	98,988	[1]—	125,987
Trent	119,841	102,170	120,375	119,383
East Anglia	67,772	66,156	[1]—	83,462
Oxford	122,566	81,961	[1]—	89,925
North West Thames	75,234	70,934	[1]—	84,049

Backlog maintenance estimates (£000s) by region 1989–90 to 1992–93

Region	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*
North East Thames	257,386	300,500	329,303	331,467
South East Thames	141,324	108,939	240,789	264,256
South West Thames	196,121	150,222	178,099	176,176
Wessex	62,060[1]	107,539	86,088	111,461
South Western	121,008	112,878	153,415	123,605
West Midlands	242,276	280,554	320,737	307,229
Mersey	80,768	50,148	46,553	64,310
North Western	95,048	104,911	126,373	144,011

[1] Data incomplete.

Backlog maintenance estimates (£ 000s) by region 1993–94 to 1995–96.

Region	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Northern and Yorkshire	321,103	393,068	369,388
Trent	132,983	129,252	200,193
Anglia and Oxford	243,135	186,912	222,923
North Thames	503,381	483,518	514,398
South Thames	378,527	334,987	327,671
South and West	230,419	263,322	243,891
West Midlands	382,500	310,541	290,490
North West	198,950	222,978	243,472

HIV and AIDS

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what funding has been spent in each region on voluntary sector HIV treatment and prevention work by health authorities in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96; [4301]

(2) what proportion of the AIDS (Control) Act 1982 reports for 1995–96 have been received by his Department; which reports are yet to be received; and of the reports so far received, what funding has been spent on HIV treatment, community care and prevention work in each region on (i) voluntary sector and (ii) statutory bodies by health authorities in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96. [4302]

Mr. Horam: The funding spent by health authorities in the statutory and voluntary sectors for HIV treatment and prevention in the years 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96 is set out in the table. Information on sums spent by health authorities on community care for both sectors is not available centrally.

Ninety-six per cent. of the AIDS Control Act reports for 1995–96 have been received to date. Those outstanding are from Camden and Islington, Avon Somerset and Walsall health authorities. The totals in the table for 1995–96 are therefore incomplete.

Treatment and prevention 1995–96[1]

English health regions	Statutory sector expenditure: Treatment £	Treatment Per cent.	Prevention £	Prevention Per cent.	Allocation to voluntary sector: Treatment £	Treatment Per cent.	Prevention £	Prevention Per cent.
Northern and Yorkshire	5,676.37	92.26	4,527.86	77.27	476.21	7.74	1,331.93	22.73
Trent	3,006.03	97.39	4,241.32	84.26	80.56	2.61	792.29	15.74
Anglia and Oxford	8,879.03	96.91	5,327.20	93.50	283.11	3.09	370.34	6.50
North Thames	84,397.03	84.97	8,912.94	69.61	14,928.65	15.03	3,891.17	30.39
South Thames	24,226.28	82.71	6,035.59	75.94	5,064.35	17.29	1,912.25	24.06
South and West	4,638.56	89.85	4,392.08	83.43	524.00	10.15	872.31	16.57
West Midlands	2,864.74	87.39	3,625.24	88.29	413.37	12.61	480.82	11.71
North West	9,843.32	96.86	4,909.61	86.50	319.10	3.14	766.24	13.50
Grand total	143,531.37	86.66	41,971.85	80.12	22,089.35	13.34	10,417.35	19.88

[1] These figures represent reports received to date, and are therefore incomplete.

Treatment and prevention 1994–95

English health regions	Statutory sector expenditure: Treatment £	Treatment Per cent.	Prevention £	Prevention Per cent.	Allocation to voluntary sector: Treatment £	Treatment Per cent.	Prevention £	Prevention Per cent.
Northern and Yorkshire	5,988.05	93.90	5,026.67	83.20	389.00	6.10	1,015.00	16.80
Trent	2,083.37	96.82	4,183.00	89.00	67.53	3.19	517.00	11.00
Anglia and Oxford	5,890.50	95.20	4,277.32	91.90	297.00	4.80	377.00	8.10
North Thames	103,181.48	94.20	3,111.96	73.50	6,353.00	5.80	1,122.00	26.50
South Thames	20,918.03	87.60	5,387.69	80.90	2,961.00	12.40	1,272.00	19.10
South and West	6,368.58	93.10	6,505.09	89.00	472.00	6.90	804.00	11.00
West Midlands	3,506.81	84.10	5,420.57	93.00	663.00	15.90	408.00	7.00
North West	6,730.03	97.10	5,813.82	91.30	201.00	2.90	554.00	8.70
Grand total	154,666.86	93.13	39,726.11	86.75	11,403.53	6.87	6,069.00	13.25

Treatment and prevention 1993–94

English health regions	Statutory sector expenditure: Treatment £	Treatment Per cent.	Prevention £	Prevention Per cent.	Allocation to voluntary sector: Treatment £	Treatment Per cent.	Prevention £	Prevention Per cent.
Northern and Yorkshire	6,119.11	92.60	5,591.52	89.20	489.00	7.40	677.00	10.80
Trent	2,208.25	96.80	4,648.84	90.50	73.00	3.20	488.00	9.50
Anglia and Oxford	4,545.22	91.80	4,246.00	96.50	406.00	8.20	154.00	3.50
North Thames	73,587.88	93.40	6,800.74	84.80	5,200.00	6.60	1,219.00	15.20
South Thames	19,606.79	87.90	5,811.50	79.30	2,699.00	12.10	1,517.00	20.70
South and West	6,233.65	93.10	5,474.84	89.30	462.00	6.90	656.00	10.70
West Midlands	2,817.50	92.00	5,320.97	93.40	245.00	8.00	376.00	6.60
North West	5,340.55	93.80	6,263.38	89.60	353.00	6.20	727.00	10.40
Grand total	120,458.94	92.39	44,157.80	88.37	9,927.00	7.61	5,814.00	11.63

Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number and percentage of patients who have contracted *(a)* MRSA and *(b)* other infections in hospitals in each of the past five years. [4662]

Mr. Horam: The Department has made no such estimates. Data on the incidence of methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus compiled by the Public Health Laboratory Service from numbers of isolates for which hospitals have requested specialist typing show a total of 2,286 confirmed reports from hospital incidents in 1992, 4,592 in 1993, 10,818 in 1994, 17,063 in 1995 and 21,272 until the end of October 1996. These figures represent the number of patients affected by MRSA, not the number infected, as about 80 per cent. of people who acquire MRSA, carry it harmlessly and do not suffer infection. An incident is three or more patients with the same strain in a month from the same hospital.

The results of the "Second National Prevalence Survey of Infection in Hospitals," published earlier this year, showed an overall prevalence rate for all types of hospital acquired infection of 9 per cent., compared with 9.2 per cent. in 1980. The survey, undertaken jointly by the Hospital Infection Society, the Public Health Laboratory Service and the Infection Control Nurses Association, was conducted between May 1993 and June 1994 and covered 37,000 patients across 23 specialties in 157 hospitals in the United Kingdom and Eire. There have been no published national studies on the incidence of hospital acquired infection, but the incidence rate is generally thought likely to be around half the prevalence rate.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for making MRSA a notifiable condition; and if he will make a statement on the reliability of current statistics on MRSA infection and deaths. [4663]

Mr. Horam: MRSA infection can take the form of many different diseases from trivial skin infections to pneumonia or septicaemia. It would be wholly

impracticable to make all these diseases notifiable. Appropriate measures to control MRSA do not depend on it being notifiable.

MRSA does not have a distinct code within the revision of the International Classification of Diseases used for encoding death registration data at the Office for National Statistics. Consequently, there are no centrally held statistics on deaths from this cause. The Public Health Laboratory Service publishes aggregate data on numbers of cases of certain severe infections, some which are due to MRSA which are voluntarily reported to it by hospitals. It also publishes data derived from isolates of MRSA sent to it for specialist typing. Although these data give helpful indications of trends, it is not possible from either of these data sets to identify the total number of cases of MRSA infection.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the use of antibiotics in *(a)* the spread of methicillin resistant staphyloccus aureus and meningitis and *(b)* resistance to anti-malaria drugs and to anti-TB drugs; and if he will make a statement. [4665]

Mr. Horam: Bacteria have the ability to develop resistance to antibiotics which are normally effective against them through exposure to these drugs. The emergence of some resistant bacteria such as MRSA is therefore a consequence of the necessity of antibiotic treatment in modern medical practice. Prevention of the spread of existing MRSA is dependent on effective infection control arrangement. In the case of tuberculosis, there is good evidence to relate the emergence of drug resistant tuberculosis to inadequate treatment of initially drug sensitive tuberculosis. In the United Kingdom, standard protocols have been in use for the treatment of tuberculosis for many years and the incidence of drug resistance is very low. New guidance issued this year aims to keep it this way.

Recently published research conducted in Gloucester into general practitioner antibiotic prescribing and meningitis has produced some interesting observations—including a possible link between meningitis and the high use of one particular type of antibiotic in towns in Gloucestershire in 1987. Such a hypothesis is, however, speculative and the findings need to be tested in other areas. The Public Health Laboratory Service will be asking its meningococcal working group for its recommendations on further work.

Drug resistance of Plasmodium falciparum malaria to the anti-malarial drug cholroquine has increased in both intensity and geographical distribution over the last few years, and resistance to the newer antimalarial, mefloquine, is now a problem in parts of south-east Asia. These facts have to be borne in mind when considering an appropriate malaria prevention strategy for travel to endemic areas.

Refugees

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the expenditure by each London borough on support for refugees and their families under the terms of the National Assistance Act 1948 as amended by subsequent legislation. [4669]

Mr. Burns: Special grant report No. 22 relating to the persons from abroad children's grant was debated on Wednesday 6 November. First claims for funding will be submitted by 31 December. Officials are in close contact with local authorities with regard to estimates of the cost of supporting childless adult asylum seekers under the National Assistance Act.

Edgware General Hospital

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* 999 emergencies, *(b)* general practitioner referred emergencies and *(c)* self-referred emergencies have been received at Edgware general hospital in each month of 1996. [3514]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:* The information requested on attendances at the Edgware hospital accident and emergency department in 1996 is as follows:

Month	*GP referrals*	*Self-referrals*	*999 referrals*	*Other*[1]	*Total*
January	655	1,877	572	671	3,775
February	609	1,795	447	649	3,500
March	695	2,041	498	718	3,952
April	614	2,154	483	703	3,954
May	577	2,180	530	802	4,098
June	551	2,315	565	993	4,424
July	610	2,361	632	905	4,508
August	539	2,144	562	694	3,989
September	473	2,000	549	858	3,880
October	465	2,042	668	814	3,939
Total	5,788	20,909	5,506	7,807	40,010

[1]Other—patients who may be referred by a number of other routes including police, schools, employers, dentists, opticians etc.

Kidney Patients

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has given to NHS dialysis centres in respect of the re-use of blood lines and dialysers; what assessment he has made of the compliance of NHS staff with manufacturers' recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [4913]

Mr. Horam: No specific guidance has been issued to national health service dialysis centres on this issue; however, general guidance on the re-use of medical devices supplied for single use was provided to the NHS in a device bulletin, DB 9501, published by the Medical Devices Agency in January 1995. Copies will be placed in the Library.

The Medical Devices Agency has issued general guidance advising users to read the manufacturer's instructions for use before using any device.

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds are currently made available to provide patients suffering kidney failure with *(a)* disconnect systems, *(b)* EPO drug treatment for anaemia and *(c)* reimbursement of the additional cost of overnight dialysis for those who work. [4914]

Mr. Horam: There is no specific funding for patients suffering kidney failure. Health authorities are given general allocations for hospital and community health services to purchase health care services for their resident population. It is for individual health authorities in consultation with the provider of services to decide the level and type of work of services purchased, taking account of local circumstances and national policies and priorities.

Correspondence

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to reply to the letter of 9 August from the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East concerning care homes in the north-west. [4976]

Mr. Burns: A reply was sent on 18 November 1996.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 20 November 1996

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many organisations have been awarded funds from the national lottery five good causes; what is the total amount in pounds; and how much of the money in percentage terms from each of the five good causes has not yet been paid out to these organisations. [3278]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The rate at which funds flow to successful schemes is determined by the time it takes to conclude award negotiations and the requirements to make staged payments. It is less than 18 months since the awards process began.

When a lottery award announcement is made, it is not necessarily to a project which is ready to begin immediately. This is likely to be true of only a few well planned and/or relatively straightforward projects. In most cases, further negotiation will be necessary. An award announcement should, therefore, be looked at more as an award in principle—as is the case with private finance initiative schemes—where it is accepted that some work still needs to be done before the project can get off the ground. Based on advice, the typical time gaps between award and spending on a project can be between nine and 15 months for major construction schemes and three and six months for smaller schemes.

The lottery distributors have identified the main reasons for such time lags. These are:

Locating partnership funding. A common approach is to apply for lottery funding first and then confirm partnership funding contributions. Most distributors wish to pay out lottery money pro rata to partnership spending, although this is not a hard and fast rule and distributors can help with short-term cash flow difficulties. On committed schemes, each £1 of lottery funds is currently matched by £1.41 of partnership money.

Detailed design of buildings etc. These may have to be submitted where sketch drawings have been accepted at assessment stage. Design competitions must sometimes be held. My Department has asked distributors to ensure lottery-funded buildings are well designed.

Obtaining full planning permission or listed building consent.

Re-negotiating leases with landlords where the scheme involves an extension or improvement to an existing facility.

Completing legal documentation on conditions. This can be quite time consuming given the funding arrangements and novelty of many schemes.

Tendering of projects—this can be made more difficult by lack of administrative support in some voluntary organisations. Higher value schemes may have to be advertised in the *Official Journal* of the European Community and European Union rules on tendering met.

Seasonal factors can affect work on construction projects (especially true of educational institutions where work might be able to take place only during the school holidays).

The expenditure profile for small and large construction projects often means that initial expenditure is low.

The distributors do, of course, wish to move projects effectively from award to completion. I do not, however, see any easy way to shorten the process, but my Department will continue to monitor this situation. It is important that capital projects are set up correctly otherwise they may not achieve value for money.

Distributors must also avoid forcing applicants to do too much preparatory work and spend too much money before the award in principle. Competition for lottery money is fierce, and is likely to become more so as the nature of the projects which the distributing bodies can support widens.

Payments for lottery schemes are staged to reflect the applicants' requirements for the funds. It would be imprudent to pay all the funds in advance. Nearly two thirds of all award recipients have received some funds.

As at 6 November, the figures and the number of award recipients in receipt of their first payment from the lottery are:

Good cause sector	*Number of awards*	*Total value of awards £ million*	*Total grant payments to date £ million*	*Percentage of total value of grants awarded but not yet paid out*	*Percentage of awardees in receipt of first payments*
Sport	2,217	372.8	80.8	78	53
Arts	1,704	636	106.4	83	63
Charities	4,757	318.4	74.3	77	73
Heritage	532	326.2	70.9	78	35
Millennium	77	760.1	14.6	98	29
Total	9,287	2,413.5	347	86	64

National Lottery (Derbyshire)

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list all payments from the national lottery awarded in Derbyshire. [2841]

Mr. Sproat *[pursuant to his answer 18 November 1996, Official Report, column 686]:* The list of awards is as follows:

National Lottery awards in Derbyshire

Body	*Award date*	*Recipient*	*Project title desc.*	*Local authority*	*Award amount £*	*UK constituency*
Arts	26 June 1996	Derby City Council	To convert the Chapel Street Building into an arts centre	Derby	1,573,500	Derby North
Sports	7 August 1995	Derby City Council	Oakwood Sports Centre	Derby	400,000	Derby North
Charity	19 December 1995	Padley Day Centre	Enable those disadvantaged to obtain improved quality of life.	Derby	344,000	Derby North
Charity	19 December 1995	The Glebe Field Trust	Community, day and respite care centre for Crich and associated villages.	Amber Valley	300,000	West Derbyshire
Sports	25 March 1996	Belper Meadows Sports Club	Artificial turf pitch plus 2 multi-use floodlit game areas.	Amber Valley	243,700	West Derbyshire
Charity	11 August 1996	Derbyshire Childrens Holiday Centre	Benefit low-income families by providing much needed respite care of children at a holiday centre.	Derby	235,000	Derby South
Charity	11 August 1996	Derby Changes	To establish a leaving care support centre in Derby to provide material and emotional support to young people.	Derby	217,037	Derby North
Sports	10 May 1996	National Trust East Midlands Region	Construction of a flagged, pitched and drained walking surface to sections of the high peak walking route.	High Peak	217,000	High Peak
Charity	23 October 1995	Hadhari Project	Care in the community for mental health sufferers.	Derby	193,000	Derby North
Sports	24 April 1996	Derby City Council	Development of a pavilion and sports facilities at Chellaston Park.	Derby	182,000	South Derbyshire
Sports	8 October 1996	Long Eaton United Football Club	Construction of football centre.	Erewash	159,474	Erewash
Charity	11 August 1996	Barrow Hill And Hollingwood Community Association	To establish and equip a community hall to provide a focus for a local deprived community.	Chesterfield	150,000	North-east Derbyshire
Charity	11 August 1996	Derby Law Centre	Increase the advice available to disadvantaged groups in Derby.	Derby	140,000	Derby South
Charity	11 August 1996	Derby West Indian Community Association	Motivate young disaffected Afro-Caribbeans through group interaction.	Derby	126,906	Derby South
Charity	11 August 1996	Derbyshire Rural Community Council	The project will counter the effects of low income/isolation in rural Derbyshire.	Derbyshire Dales	124,294	West Derbyshire
Sports	23 February 1996	The Royal School For The Deaf Development Trust	The Dukes Barn extension.	Derbyshire Dales	92,485	West Derbyshire
Sports	7 November 1995	Elvaston Cricket Club	New cricket pavilion.	Erewash	86,002	Erewash
Charity	11 August 1996	Home Start Swadlingcote And District	Secure permanent accommodation and expand our services to meet increasing needs through providing a secure safe environment.	South Derbyshire	85,920	South Derbyshire
Charity	19 December 1995	Derby Asian Horticulture Resource Training Initiative	To improve and maintain all facilities until self funding is achieved.	Derby	85,000	Derby South
Charity	19 December 1995	The Goseley Community Centre	Build and equip a community centre on disadvantaged/isolated estate.	South Derbyshire	83,300	South Derbyshire
Charity	11 August 1996	Alternatives Activity Centre	Provide firm foundations for choices, opportunities, training and education for people with learning difficulties.	Derby	81,840	Derby North

National Lottery awards in Derbyshire

Body	*Award date*	*Recipient*	*Project title desc.*	*Local authority*	*Award amount £*	*UK constituency*
Charity	11 August 1996	Derby Council For Voluntary Service Limited	Increase the awareness of local Youths of services which are available to them and how to access them.	Derby	81,802	Derby South
Charity	20 November 1995	Heanor Parish Church Salcare	Expansion of furniture service to low income and disadvantaged families.	Amber Valley	79,783	Amber Valley
Sports	1 May 1996	Nutbrook Cricket Club	Pavilion.	Erewash	78,096	Erewash
Charity	19 December 1995	Mansfield And District Multiple Sclerosis Society	To enhance lives of disabled people in a depressed area.	Bolsover	78,000	Bolsover
Charity	20 November 1995	Cross Roads Care Derby And South Derbyshire	Giving carers a break, time to be me.	Derby	69,036	Derby South
Sports	24 January 1996	Langley Mills United Cricket Club	New pavilion.	Amber Valley	60,670	Amber Valley
Charity	11 August 1996	Fairplay	Promote training, social and leisure opportunities for disabled young people in Chesterfield.	Chesterfield	60,000	Chesterfield
Charity	19 December 1995	1st South Normanton Scout and Guide Group	South Normanton Scout and Guide Group new scout hut project.	Bolsover	59,300	Bolsover
Charity	11 August 1996	The Ace Club	The establishment of a 'Before and After' school club.	Derby	58,118	Derby South
Sports	6 June 1995	Pyegrove Tennis Club	Redevelopment at Glossop Pyegrove Tennis Club.	High Peak	55,150	High Peak
Arts	17 May 1995	Tintwistle Band	Replacement band room.	High Peak	52,709	High Peak
Arts	17 May 1995	Royal School for the Deaf and College for Deaf People	Sign language video library.	Derby	50,000	Derby North
Sports	01 June 1996	Birchvale and Thornsett Cricket Club	New clubhouse with disabled facilities, to replace old prefab pavilion.	High Peak	47,657	High Peak
Charity	11 August 1996	Home Start Ilkeston	To help young families with parenting skills, with the aim of preventing family breakdown.	Erewash	47,400	Erewash
Sports	09 January 1996	Derby City Council (Sunnyhill Community Centre)	Development of new bowls green and pavilion.	Derby	46,400	Derby South
Charity	20 November 1995	Take A Break	Opportunity for inner city women to reach their full potential.	Derby	43,000	Derby South
Charity	23 October 1995	National Association of Drama with the Visually Handicapped	To improve the Association's efficiency.	Erewash	42,436	Erewash
Sports	03 July 1996	Clowne Miners Welfare	Refurbishment of existing pavilion with ladies and gentlemen's toilet, including disabled toilet. Ramp for wheelchair users. Replace existing storage area.	Bolsover	41,769	Bolsover
Charity	19 December 1995	Derwent Rural Counselling Service	Improve the mental health of communities affected by rural deprivation.	Derbyshire Dales	41,700	West Derbyshire
Arts	15 November 1995	The Marple Band	Purchase of instruments.	Derbyshire Dales	41,400	High Peak
Heritage	26 April 1995	Eyam Museum Ltd.	Eyam Museum, Eyam.	Derbyshire Dales	41,125	West Derbyshire
Sports	09 January 1996	High Peak Borough Council (Glossop Sports Centre)	Convert sauna and sunbed room to create a fitness suite.	High Peak	39,000	High Peak
Arts	13 September 1995	High Peak Borough Council	Construction and erection of Victorian style band-stand.	High Peak	36,090	High Peak
Charity	20 November 1995	The Derby Furniture Project	The Derby Community Electrical Project.	Derby	36,000	Derby North
Arts	24 January 1996	Newhall Band	Purchase of instruments.	South Derbyshire	32,863	South Derbyshire

National Lottery awards in Derbyshire

Body	*Award date*	*Recipient*	*Project title desc.*	*Local authority*	*Award amount £*	*UK constituency*
Arts	02 April 1996	Glossopdale Community College Band Trust	Purchase of instruments.	High Peak	32,610	High Peak
Charity	23 October 1995	Derwent Stepping Stones Nursery and Community Training Centre	Establish a community based employment and training programme.	Derby	30,000	Derby North
Heritage	14 August 1996	Holy Trinity Church PCC	Holy Trinity Church, dinting-roof	High Peak	29,700	High Peak
Sports	10 January 1996	Swadlincote Rifle and Pistol Club	To construct an airgun range to ISU specifications range.	South Derbyshire	29,207	South Derbyshire
Charity	11 August 1996	The Winchester Club	Improving the lives of people with learning difficulties.	Derby	25,050	Derby South
Arts	13 September 1995	Commotion Theatre Company	Purchase of touring vehicle.	Derbyshire Dales	25,008	West Derbyshire
Charity	19 December 1995	Northeast Derbyshire Citizens Advice Bureau	Helpline service for the deaf and speech impaired.	North-east Derbyshire	24,317	North-east Derbyshire
Charity	11 August 1996	Derby Children's Friendship Group	Providing fun, educational breaks for Derby's low income family youth.	Derby	23,750	Derby North
Arts	26 June 1996	Nottingham City Transport Band	Purchase of instruments.	Erewash	22,735	Erewash
Charity	11 August 1996	Peak Dale Youth Motorcycle Club	To link ability, training and safety to motorcycle riding.	High Peak	22,000	High Peak
Arts	15 November 1995	Ireland Colliery Chesterfield Band	New instruments.	Chesterfield	17,915	Chesterfield
Sports	6 May 1996	South Wingfield Cricket Club	Artificial practice cricket wicket and to increase playing area.	Amber Valley	17,838	Amber Valley
Sports	7 March 1996	Stanton By Dale Cricket Club	Extension to the pavilion to accommodate showers and additional kitchen facilities Cricket square also requires drainage facility and artificial pitch.	Erewash	17,000	Erewash
Charity	19 December 1995	Challenger Disabled Sailing Group	To develop the potential for disabled people to go sailing.	North-east Derbyshire	15,793	North-east Derbyshire
Sports	9 March 1996	Swarkestone Sailing Club	Replacement of training fleet with 6 modern dinghies.	South Derbyshire	15,660	South Derbyshire
Charity	23 October 1995	Derby Shopmobility	To ensure independence through the free use of our equipment.	Derby	15,000	Derby North
Charity	19 December 1995	Chesapeake Playgroup	To help to keep the playgroup up and running.	Derby	15,000	Derby North
Arts	2 April 1996	Partington Theatre Club	General refurbishment and installation of fire escape.	High Peak	15,000	High Peak
Charity	20 November 1995	Duckmanton and District Community Transport	Provide a community minibus for the disadvantaged inhabitants of Duckmanton.	Chesterfield	14,500	Chesterfield
Charity	20 November 1995	Peak Park Trust	Restoration of cart shed at Eccles House for new workspace.	High Peak	14,170	High Peak
Charity	20 November 1995	Ashgate Hospice	To improve access to Hospice services for the terminally ill.	North-east Derbyshire	13,750	North-east Derbyshire
Heritage	19 September 1995	Peel Centre Charitable Trust	The Peel Centre, Dronfield.	North-east Derbyshire	12,500	North-east Derbyshire
Sports	6 September 1995	Derbyshire Sailing Endeavour	Provide shore facilities for disabled sailing and a training boat.	Derbyshire Dales	12,283	West Derbyshire
Sports	9 August 1996	Long Eaton Sub-Aqua Club	Purchase boat and trailer.	Erewash	11,992	Erewash
Sports	15 May 1995	Buxworth Cricket Club	Renewal of sports pavilion.	High Peak	11,400	High Peak
Sports	9 January 1996	Derby City Council (Boulton Lane Community Centre	Upgrade and improve existing muga to synthetic playing surface. Providing new floodlights. Extending care parking area.	Derby	11,000	South Derbyshire

National Lottery awards in Derbyshire

Body	*Award date*	*Recipient*	*Project title desc.*	*Local authority*	*Award amount £*	*UK constituency*
Charity	19 December 1995	North Derbyshire Women's Aid	Accessible computer system for organisation.	Chesterfield	8,744	Chesterfield
Charity	19 December 1995	Relate, Derby and District Marriage Guidance	To assist disadvantaged clients to help themselves and their families.	Derby	8,100	Derby North
Sports	5 June 1996	Glossop Junior Football Club	Floodlighting of artificial football pitch (red shale all weather).	High Peak	8,050	High Peak
Sports	5 July 1995	Lullington Park Cricket Club	Extended practise and dressing room facilities.	South Derbyshire	8,000	South Derbyshire
Arts	21 February 1996	Czuplak Ukrainian Folk-Dance Company and Musicians	Sound mixing console and PA system.	Derby	7,943	Derby South
Charity	19 December 1995	Relate—Chesterfield and North–East Derbyshire Marriage Guidance	Relate-line—Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Telephone Counselling Service.	Chesterfield	7,713	Chesterfield
Arts	13 September 1995	Gresley Male Voice Choir	Modern musical instruments and amplification equipment.	South Derbyshire	7,500	South Derbyshire
Charity	19 December 1995	Blindfold Club Derby	Blindness need not mean being confined to ones home.	Derby	7,500	Derby South
Charity	11 August 1996	Derby Toc H Childrens Camp	Replace a bad weather play marquee that has become unserviceable.	Derby	7,500	Derby North
Charity	11 August 1996	Child Development Centre Toy Library	To work with a local school to design and build equipment and toys for children with special needs.	Chesterfield	7,112	Chesterfield
Charity	19 December 1995	Fun For All	To improve recreation and social opportunities for deprived young people.	Bolsover	6,600	Bolsover
Charity	11 August 1996	North Wingfield Disabled Miners' Group	Enable the disabled group members to retain their independence.	Chesterfield	6,782	North-east Derbyshire
Charity	11 August 1996	Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group	To provide computer equipment/software for the organisation.	Derbyshire Dales	6,000	West Derbyshire
Arts	26 June 1996	East of England Orchestra Ltd.	Administration and education equipment.	Derby	5,094	Derby North
Arts	17 May 1995	The Merrill Community School	Purchase if instruments for the Music Centre at Merrill School.	South Derbyshire	5,000	South Derbyshire
Charity	11 August 1996	Keldholme Community Association	To enhance the facilities for four groups within a Community Association located in a poor area of Derby.	Derby	4,950	Derby South
Charity	19 December 1995	Highview Play Group	Playgroup	Derby	4,870	Derby North
Charity	19 December 1995	Sunnycroft Old Peoples Welfare	Sunnycroft Club improving pensioners lifestyle through community action.	Chesterfield	4,860	North-east Derbyshire
Charity	11 August 1996	Mary Swanwick Playscheme	Provide a holiday playscheme for our local community.	Chesterfield	4,114	Chesterfield
Sports	1 May 1996	Allestree Cricket Club	Equipment/Artificial practice facilities.	Derby	3,850	Derby North
Charity	19 December 1995	Lakeside Pre-school Playgroup	To give children a safe welcoming environment to play in.	Erewash	3,500	Erewash
Sports	4 October 1995	Parwich British Legion Cricket Club	Artificial pitch with removable nets, sight screens and improvements to scoreboard.	Derbyshire Dales	3,431	West Derbyshire

National Lottery awards in Derbyshire

Body	*Award date*	*Recipient*	*Project title desc.*	*Local authority*	*Award amount £*	*UK constituency*
Charity	11 August 1996	145th Derby Hilltop Scout Group	Provide renovation of outdated facilities outside the scope of fundraising.	Derby	3,150	Derby North
Charity	20 November 1995	21st Ilkeston Scout Group	Socially deprived area. Will benefit entire community.	Erewash	3,000	Erewash
Charity	19 December 1995	Ripley Neighbourhood Care Scheme	To enable us to help older people in Ripley.	Amber Valley	3,000	Amber Valley
Charity	11 August 1996	Gamesley Toy Library	To improve run down toy library facility on housing estate.	High Peak	2,700	High Peak
Charity	19 December 1995	Campaign for Tackling Acquired Deafness	To provide equipment to hearing impaired people on low incomes.	Derby	2,652	Derby South
Sports	5 September 1996	Brailsford and Ednaston Cricket Club	Non Turf cricket wicket.	Derbyshire Dales	2,500	West Derbyshire
Charity	20 November 1995	Bolsover Elderly Self Help Group	To give socially isolated elderly people a quality of life.	Bolsover	2,397	Bolsover
Charity	19 December 1995	Harpur Hill Playground Appeal	To provide a safe, stimulating, pleasant environment for our children.	High Peak	2,000	High Peak
Charity	19 December 1995	Hadfield Centre Playgroup	Hadfield Centre Playgroups essential introduction to pre-school IT.	High Peak	1,964	High Peak
Charity	19 December 1995	Rathbone Community Industry	To improve users' literacy and competitiveness in the labour market.	Derby	1,948	Derby South
Charity	19 December 1995	Stanley Playworks	To improve the standard of local children's lives.	Chesterfield	1,800	North-east Derbyshire
Charity	23 October 1995	Stanley Village Playgroup	Maintain essential community development utilise and maximise interest.	Derby	1,700	Derby North
Charity	19 December 1995	Darley Dale Primary Out of School Club	To secure the future of the club financially for the next three years.	Derbyshire Dales	1,086	West Derbyshire
Charity	20 November 1995	West End Toy Library	Develop local community supporting those who are disadvantaged.	Derby	1,000	Derby North
Charity	19 December 1995	Derbyshire County Childminding Association	To support childminders by offering training opportunities for all.	Derby	820	Derby South
Charity	19 December 1995	Playwell Parent and Toddler Group	To provide a wider range of toys and activities.	Erewash	600	Erewash
Charity	19 December 1995	Eckington Friendship Club	To help elderly people in safe and pleasant environment.	North-east Derbyshire	500	North-east Derbyshire
Charity	11 August 1996	Laser Venture Scount Unit	Purchase camping equipment to partake in prestigious Queen Scout Award.	North-east Derbyshire	500	North-east Derbshire
				Total (112 awards)	7,105,070	

ENVIRONMENT

Property Blight (Compensation)

Sir Keith Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has so far been made by the interdepartmental committee on compensation for property affected by rail and road schemes. [2000]

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many submissions he has received on the consultation paper on blight arising from major infrastructure projects; [5238]

(2) when he expects the interdepartmental working group on blight to report; and what plans he has to bring forward proposals to implement its recommendations. [5239]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have today placed in the Library a copy of the progress report of the interdepartmental working group on blight.

This group, which was set up in March, published a discussion paper in June. Sixty-one responses were received. A sub-group held discussions with officials in France, Germany and the Netherlands, and further briefing was received in respect of Belgium, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, the USA and Japan.

The Halifax building society has been invited to undertake a study into trends in property prices in areas which have experienced major infrastructure developments. Work on this study is in hand. A further study, commissioned in October 1995, into the operation of compulsory purchase procedures concludes this month. The group will be considering the final report of this study to see how its findings might inform the group's own work.

The group is now considering a range of options for changes to law and practice. Their consideration will include an assessment both of direct costs of implementing change, and of the wider implications for compulsory acquisition and compensation. I have asked that the final report should be submitted as early as possible in the new year. Any changes which we might propose to existing law and practice would be subject to consultation in the usual way.

Environmental Auditing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the ways in which his Department has *(a)* demonstrated by example and *(b)* promoted externally, the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing; and if he will make a statement. [4492]

Mr. Clappison: My Department is the lead Department for ensuring that Government policies and programmes, including its own, take proper account of environmental concerns, in accordance with the 1990 environment White Paper, "This Common Inheritance", and "Sustainable Development: the UK Strategy", published in 1994.

To this end, the Government have made a repeated commitment in successive White Paper annual reports to subject their policies to environmental appraisal. In 1991, the Department published "Policy Appraisal and the Environment", which gives extensive guidance on how to integrate environmental considerations into Government policy assessments. Green Ministers recently reaffirmed the need for all Departments to have adequate systems to ensure that the environmental implications of their policies were properly considered. Consultants are evaluating Government Departments' experiences with the guide and will report early next year. Green Ministers intend to publish a booklet of case studies in the new year, showing good examples of environmental appraisal in Departments.

My Department aims continually to reduce the impact of its own activities on the environment and to improve the management of its own resources. Its management audit services division has been trained to undertake environmental audits and has, for example, recently examined management and waste issues as part of the Department's strategy to reduce waste by 15 per cent. over two years.

Another of the Department's published objectives is to reduce the environmental impact of its buildings, where practicable, by undertaking objective assessments using BREEAM—the Building Research Establishment's environmental assessment method. Preliminary assessments of the Department's two new headquarters buildings—Eland house and Ashdown house in central London—have been carried out. As a result, the designs incorporate features such as the use of energy-efficient double-glazed panels, specially treated to reflect heat back into the building; displacement ventilation with static cooling and heating; combined heat and power systems, which use less gas and use waste heat to supply hot water, space heating and power for the cooling system; efficient boilers, with low nitrogen dioxide burners for supplementary heating; heat exchangers and heat exhaust recovery to avoid the loss of energy to the atmosphere in cooling towers.

My Department supports the use of BREEAM across the wider Government estate and green Ministers agreed recently that all Departments should use the BREEAM system when commissioning new or substantial refurbishment of existing ones. My Department has also commissioned the Environment Agency to produce do it yourself environmental performance checklist for premises managers on the Government estate, which will help to promote further improvement in the use of energy, water and other resources, in reducing waste and saving money.

My Department has been active in promoting environmental management and auditing more widely. As the United Kingdom competent body for administering the EC eco-management and audit scheme—EMAS—the Department has for the last two years promoted the scheme widely to industry—through national advertising campaigns and regional events; by publishing guides about the scheme and how it operates; by producing information videos and regular newsletters; through direct mailing to business; and by the introduction of a grant—Small company environmental energy management scheme—to help smaller businesses participate in the scheme. The UK has also led the way in promoting EMAS by introducing the first national extension of the scheme, now a fully operational version in the local government sector. My Department is conducting an exercise to test the feasibility of applying EMAS in a pilot area of housing policy and programme expenditure.

The Government strongly encourage the take-up of EMAS by business because the scheme provides a rigorous but voluntary framework for managing, improving and reporting publicly on environmental performance. The scheme is also proving to be an effective tool for improving efficiency and competitiveness. Case studies, based on the first industrial sites registered under EMAS, and which demonstrate the environmental and business benefits of the scheme, will be published shortly.

In partnership with the Department of Trade and Industry, my Department sponsors the environmental technology best practice programme to promote better environmental practices that help to reduce business costs for UK industry and commerce. The programme disseminates information and advice on environmental technologies and techniques, including the benefits of implementing environmental management systems and audits. Examples of best practice are promoted throughout industry by means of environmental performance guides, best practice case studies and guides, workshops, seminars and other events.

In promoting EMAS, my Department has also encouraged take-up of the complementary British industry standard for environmental management systems, BS 7750. This was the first standard of its kind in the world, coinciding with the development of EMAS, and it has contributed greatly to the agreement of a new international standard, ISO 14001, which will be replacing national standards and will provide industry with a convenient route towards EMAS registration. I am delighted that my Department's own office services division has recently been awarded a certificate of compliance with both BS 7750 and ISO 14001 for its environmental management system—the first award to a central Government Department.

EU Environmental Directives

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the report on the proposal in the European Parliament for a council directive amending directive 85/337/EEC on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment, A4–0343/96. [4723]

Sir Paul Beresford: The common position adopted by the European Council of Ministers on a directive amending directive 85/337/EEC will greatly improve the consistency and quality of decision making within the European Community. It is now for the European Commission to consider the report and put forward an opinion to the Council.

Solrec, Heysham (Air Pollution)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what caused the release into the atmosphere of material being processed at Solrec at Heysham; and what action he has taken to prevent a recurrence. [4714]

Mr. Clappison: On 19 August 1996 there was an unauthorised release from the process for the application of steam distillation to produce solid residues at Solrec in Heysham. This process is used for solvent recovery. The unauthorised release was caused by a runaway exothermic reaction in a vessel, which caused pressure to build up in the vessel, resulting in a controlled release via a safety device.

As a result of the incident, the Environment Agency served a prohibition notice on Solrec Ltd. under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. This prohibits the company from operating the process until it has produced a procedure to demonstrate that the process can be performed without producing exothermic decomposition of the residues.

I further understand from the Environment Agency that Solrec intends to abandon the particular process which gave rise to the unauthorised release.

Sustainable Development (EU Report)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the report by the European Parliament on the review of the European Community programme of policy and action in relation to the environment and sustainable development, A4-0300/96 with reference to his Department's policy on sustainable development. [4724]

Mr. Clappison: My Department will be assessing in due course the first reading opinion of the European Parliament on the report, given on 13 November 1996.

Rainforest Conservation

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will report on the outcome of the meeting of the conference of the parties to the convention on biological diversity, with particular reference to progress made to the conservation of tropical rainforests. [4507]

Mr. Clappison: This meeting, held in Buenos Aires from 4 to 15 November, successfully reached agreement on continued progress under the convention on a number of fronts. These included commitment to priority work on the assessment and monitoring of biodiversity, including the endorsement of a worldwide initiative for taxonomy developed by the subsidiary body to the convention earlier this year. Work programmes were agreed on agricultural and forest biodiversity. The latter will complement and not duplicate the work of the intergovernmental panel on forests and any successor process.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State attended the ministerial segment on 13 and 14 November and called for greater focus in priority setting under this convention. He also stressed the importance of national target setting and reporting, along the lines already under way in the UK, to enable global assessment of progress and efforts to implement the convention.

Sellafield Nuclear Plant (Discharges)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the permissible limits set for the annual discharge of nitrous oxide from Sellafield; and what quantities of nitrous oxide were emitted by British Nuclear Fuels from Sellafield in each of the past 10 years. [4721]

Mr. Clappison: The Environment Agency monitors releases of, and set limits for, oxides of nitrogen NO_x under the integrated pollution control regime. The description, oxides of nitrogen, includes nitrous oxide N_2O as well as nitric oxide NO and nitrogen dioxide NO_2.

Oxides of nitrogen were released by the large boilers, which were regulated under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. These have now closed and data are available only for the years 1993 and 1994, as follows:

Year	*Annual release limit tonnes per year*	*Actual release tonnes per year*
1993	1,550	177.3
1994	2,132	200

Integrated pollution control authorisations have been issued this year for the Magnox and Thorp processes with the following limits for NO_x:

Process	*Annual release limit tonnes per year*
Magnox	35
Thorp	90

Actual release data will be available from 1997.

Planning Constraints

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to ensure that planning constraints on agricultural buildings are applied equally to small and large farm holdings; and if he will make a statement. [4923]

Sir Paul Beresford: We have no plans to amend the thresholds for agricultural permitted development rights in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995, under which holdings of less than 5 hectares enjoy more limited rights than larger holdings.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information is collated centrally on *(a)* the long-term revenue commitments and *(b)* any other commitments arising as a result of private finance initiative projects agreed by (i) his Department and (ii) agencies accountable to his Department. [5085]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Government response to the Treasury Committee report on the private finance initiative agreed the importance of collecting and monitoring information on future spending commitment arising from contracts under the private finance initiative. Such information is now being collected. The response stated that aggregate projections of the level of expenditure that is expected to arise from signed contracts under the initiative would be published in the 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report."

Housing (Population Threshold)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the basis for the proposed population threshold to be used as the main criterion in defining a rural area for the purposes of the rural exemption for housing association tenants from the purchase grant scheme; and if he will make a statement. [5010]

Mr. Clappison: The new purchase grant scheme will allow more housing association tenants the choice of buying their own home at a discount funded by a Government grant. Landlords will receive the full market value of any property sold under the scheme, and will have to set aside sale proceeds to provide replacement properties to help other families in need.

We announced in last year's rural White Paper our proposal to exclude small rural villages from the scheme. The aim of the rural exemption is to protect the supply of social housing in small rural villages where there would be a particular difficulty in securing replacement homes. In larger towns there is greater scope for a replacement home to be provided either through development or the purchase of existing properties.

We have consulted on the detailed proposed designations for every county and area of England using a population guideline of 3,000 people. We believe that this identifies those small settlements that need to be protected, and it is consistent with the approach of our rural housing programmes. We indicated that we would consider cases referred to us where a settlement's population exceeded 3,000, but we would want to establish that there was a special reason why the settlement concerned faced similar problems to smaller settlements in replacing homes sold.

We expect to announce the outcome of the consultation exercise shortly.

Mr right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has also consulted on a different approach to be used in Wales.

Pleasure Boats

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the basis for the decision to remove the requirement for local authority licences for pleasure boats on waters owned or managed by British Waterways and the Environment Agency; and what is the expected saving to *(a)* the private sector and *(b)* the public sector from the proposed deregulation order. [4978]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Powers available to local authorities under the Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1907 to license pleasure boats duplicate those available to British Waterways on navigations that it manages. The Government have therefore decided to disapply the local authority powers in those circumstances. Powers available to the Environment Agency are less comprehensive than those of British Waterways. In the light of the recent consultation exercise, the Government are therefore reconsidering the inclusion of the Environment Agency in the proposed deregulation order. It is not possible to estimate the expected savings, but in future hire boat businesses which operate on deregulated waters and which have been subject to local authority licensing will benefit financially by having to pay licence fees to only one licensing authority.

Bricks

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's latest estimate of the number of weeks' supply of bricks held in stock. [5364]

Mr. Clappison: At the end of September, the latest date for which information is available, there were just over one billion bricks in stock, representing some 17½ weeks' deliveries at current rates of delivery.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Environmental Auditing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the ways in which her Department has *(a)* demonstrated by example and *(b)* promoted externally, the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing; and if she will make a statement. [4542]

Mr. Robin Squire: We are committed to carrying out the Department's work efficiently, with minimal negative environmental impact. We have undertaken energy audits, and included environmental objectives in the Department's business plan. Our energy consumption continues to fall in line with Government policy. For example, following the connection of the Department's Moorfoot building to the Sheffield combined heat and power station in 1995, 95 per cent. of Moorfoot's heat now comes from a green source.

In October, I launched the schools environmental assessment method which encourages and enables schools to evaluate their environmental impact, and which also includes revised energy targets for new school buildings.

School Inspections (Manningham)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were the main conclusions of the Office for Standards in Education report following the inspection of schools in the Manningham area of Bradford; if she will list the schools included in that inspection; and if she will make a statement. [4387]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what information is collected centrally on *(a)* the long-term revenue commitments and *(b)* any other commitments arising as a result of private finance initiative projects agreed by (i) her Department and (ii) agencies accountable to her Department. [5086]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Government response to the Treasury Committee report on the private finance initiative agreed the importance of collecting and monitoring information on future spending commitments arising from contracts under the PFI. Such information is now being collected. The response stated that aggregated projections of the level of expenditure that is expected to arise from signed contracts under the initiative would be published in the 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report."

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Environmental Auditing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the ways in which his Department has *(a)* demonstrated by example and *(b)* promoted externally, the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing; and if he will make a statement. [4544]

Mr. Willetts: My Department and its agencies play a full part in supporting the initiatives being carried forward in response to the 1990 White Paper, "This Common Inheritance", including membership of the green Ministers group. The Department implements an annual green housekeeping action plan, which is subject to regular audit.

Examples of specific initiatives undertaken include:

1. Work following a study into the feasibility of contract energy management has resulted in a reduction of over-capacity in the water heating system in the Cabinet Office buildings at Nos. 68 to 72 Whitehall and in Downing street. The remodelled system provides flexibility whilst continuing to recognise the need for standby facilities to be readily available.

2. In the security facilities executive, the Government car service was one of the first organisations to sign up to the London clean air charter and has adopted CityClean and low sulphur diesel fuels. All GCS cars are fitted with catalytic converters and gas powered vehicles are on trial.

Where appropriate, further examples are recorded in the Department's and its agencies' annual reports.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the ways in which his Department has *(a)* demonstrated by example and *(b)* promoted externally, the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing; and if he will make a statement. [4543]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General.

PRIME MINISTER

Environmental Auditing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the ways in which his Department has *(a)* demonstrated by example and *(b)* promoted externally, the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing; and if he will make a statement. [4538]

The Prime Minister: For these purposes, my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General today.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sudan

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current level of his Department's provision for the Sudan; what plans there are to increase it; and if he will make a statement. [4783]

Mr. Hanley: The UK has committed nearly £13 million in humanitarian assistance to Sudan and Sudanese refugees bilaterally and through the European Community since the start of 1995. Future assistance will depend on levels of humanitarian need.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information is collated centrally on *(a)* the long–term revenue commitments and *(b)* any other commitments arising as a result of private finance initiative projects agreed by (i) his Department and (ii) agencies accountable to his Department. [5084]

Mr. Hanley: The Government response to the Treasury Committee report on the private finance initiative agreed on the importance of collecting and monitoring information on future spending commitments under the private finance initiative. Such information is now being collected. The response stated that aggregate projections of the level of expenditure that is expected to arise from signed contracts under the initiative would be published in the 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report."

Royal Family (Overseas Visits)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 30 October, *Official Report*, column *167*, how much of the total cost to his Department arising from visits abroad by members of the royal family in 1995–96 related to clothing. [3204]

Mr. Rifkind *[holding answer 11 November 1996]:* In 1995–96 the total cost to this Department of clothing for official visits overseas by members of the royal family and those accompanying them was £47,452.

As I advised in my answer to the hon. Member on 18 July *Official Report*, column *610*, high profile and worthy representation of Britain abroad inevitably involves additional expenditure on clothes by members of the royal family and certain of those accompanying them.

It is right that such expenditure is met by the Government for official overseas visits undertaken at the Government's request.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what information is collated centrally on *(a)* the long-term revenue commitments and *(b)* any other commitments arising as a result of private finance initiative projects agreed by (i) his Department and (ii) agencies accountable to his Department. [5081]

Mr. Streeter: The Government response to the Treasury Committee report on the private finance initiative agreed on the importance of collecting and monitoring information on future spending commitments arising from contracts under PFI. Such information is now being collected. The response stated that aggregate projections of the level of expenditure that is expected to arise from signed contracts under PFI would be published in the 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report."

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Attorney-General what information is collated centrally on *(a)* the long-term revenue commitments and *(b)* any other commitments arising as a result of private finance initiative projects agreed by (i) his Department and (ii) agencies accountable to his Department. [5082]

The Attorney-General: The Government response to the Treasury Committee report on the private finance initiative agreed on the importance of collecting and monitoring information of future spending commitments arising from contracts under the private finance initiative. Such information is now being collected. The response stated that aggregate projection of the level of expenditure that is expected to arise from signed contracts under the initiative would be published in the 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report."

WALES

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the cost of staff, employed full-time or part-time by his Department, to provide information and publicity in 1996–97. [3574]

Mr. Hague: For 1996–97, I estimate the cost of staff employed in my press office to be £335,000 and in my publicity branch to be £270,000.

Alcoholism

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* people and *(b)* children under the age of 18 years have been diagnosed as alcoholics in Wales in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [4411]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not available centrally. However, the number of finished consultant episodes in NHS hospitals in Wales in each of the last five years where the primary diagnosis was alcohol dependency syndrome is given in the following table. The figures do not relate to the number of people treated as one person may have more than one finished consultant episode during the period. Only those admitted to NHS hospitals are included.

Finished consultant episodes with a primary diagnosis of alcohol dependency syndrome

	People aged under 18	*People aged 18 and over*	*Total*
1991–92	10	1,261	1,271
1992–93	5	1,316	1,321
1993–94	3	1,191	1,194
1994–95	6	1,252	1,258
1995–96[1]	4	746	750

[1] Data for 1995–96 are not comparable to earlier years as records are not yet available for all hospitals and the diagnosis code used was different from earlier years.

General Practitioners

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding difficulties in appointing general practitioners in Blaenau Gwent. [4265]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office has received two such representations during the last two years.

Teachers (Sickness)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of schoolteachers in Wales *(a)* retiring and *(b)* obliged to take extended leave as a result of (i) sickness and (ii) nervous strain in Wales between 1985 and 1995. [3681]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Information on extended leave taken by teachers is not held centrally. Information on the number of teachers retiring on infirmity grounds is shown in the following table:

Number of teachers retiring on infirmity grounds 1985–86 to 1994–95[1]

Local education authority[2]	*1985–86*	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Clwyd	7	17	14	18	28	33	23	38	66	72
Dyfed	20	32	26	33	48	46	45	65	61	67
Gwent	16	25	22	26	47	41	51	53	52	64
Gwynedd	20	14	15	26	38	35	34	46	53	67
Mid Glamorgan	33	48	48	64	71	86	77	118	117	96
Powys	11	5	2	14	14	10	14	21	21	27
South Glamorgan	29	25	19	27	47	38	50	37	52	60
West Glamorgan	14	25	20	33	35	61	66	59	62	61
Wales	150	191	166	241	328	350	350	437	484	514

Notes:
[1] Includes grant-maintained and independent school staff who are in the teachers' superannuation scheme and further education or higher education teachers who are in the TSS. Excludes those returning to non pensionable occasional service.
[2] Last known LEA in which the teacher served.
Source:
DfEE, Database of Teacher Records.

Fish-eating Birds (Killing)

Mr. Ron Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many licences he has issued during the last 12 months for the taking of piscivorous birds; how many birds of what species have been taken under each such licence; and on what evidence such licences have been issued. [4744]

Mr. Hague: During the 12-month period 1 October 1995 to 30 September 1996, 13 licences permitting the limited shooting of piscivorous birds were issued.

Under these licences, a total of eight cormorants and 13 goosanders were taken. Licences for the shooting of piscivorous birds, as a means of reinforcing other scaring methods, are granted taking account of information supplied by the applicant and on advice provided by ADAS following site visits and consultations with other interested bodies.

The number of birds shot against five of the licences is listed in the following table:

Birds	*Number*	*Number*	*Number*	*Number*	*Number*
Goosanders	1	6	3	0	3
Cormorants	0	3	1	1	3

No birds were shot under the remaining eight licences.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress he has made to date on the implementation of the mitigation measures associated with the Cardiff bay barrage; and what recent relevant communications he has had with the European Commission. [4745]

Mr. Hague: The establishment of the bird reserve compensation measures in an operational matter for the corporation, assisted by the Land Authority for Wales.

My officials have recently reported the following progress to the European Commission:

- 301 hectares (743 acres), that is over 75 per cent. of the land required for the reserve has already been secured by agreement and discussions are continuing on the remainder;
- a planning application is being considered by the local planning authority;
- the corporation has tendered the works contract for development of the reserve and its objective is to establish the reserve before the start of the impoundment of water within Cardiff bay in 1998.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information is collated centrally on *(a)* the long-term revenue commitments and *(b)* any other commitments

arising as a result of private finance initiative projects agreed by (i) his Department and (ii) agencies accountable to his Department. [5073]

Mr. Hague: The Department maintains a full record of information about private finance initiative projects it has approved. Information about long-term revenue commitments resulting from PFI projects will be published in the Welsh Office's departmental report and in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report", published by HM Treasury.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agriculture Council

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 18 and 19 November; and if he will make a statement. [5466]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I represented the United Kingdom at the Agriculture Council in Brussels on 18 November, accompanied by my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office. The Council formally adopted the legislative text giving effect to changes in the EU beef regime agreed in principle at the Council in October. Germany maintained its negative vote.

The Council had a first discussion of proposals for a system identification and registration of bovine animals, together with a linked proposal on the labelling of beef and beef products. I urged the Council to proceed quickly with a technical examination of the proposal on identification and registration so as to reach early conclusions and so facilitate the work on a computerised cattle traceability system already begun in the United Kingdom. I welcomed efforts to improve information about beef and beef products for consumers, but cautioned against placing heavy bureaucratic burdens on small operators. I also took the opportunity of this Council meeting to report on the progress made in the United Kingdom on BSE eradication and in particular in meeting the pre-conditions laid down in the June Florence agreement.

The Council had general debates on proposals for amendments to EU support arrangements for durum wheat, and for a common organisation of the market in potatoes. On the latter, I indicated the UK Government's readiness to support a genuinely lightweight EU regime. The Council also drew up a declaration urging progress on establishing a European agency for veterinary and phytosanitary inspection.

On animal welfare issues, I joined my German and Swedish colleagues in pressing the Commission to bring forward its review and proposals on battery cages for laying hens, and proposals on staging posts and vehicle standards for the protection of animals during transport. I also urged the Commission to ensure the proper implementation of Commission decision 96/239 regarding consignments of beef and beef products made from material not originating in the United Kingdom.

The presidency and the Agriculture Commissioner reported to the Council on the conference on rural development which the presidency had hosted in Cork on 7 to 9 November. I welcomed the impetus which the Cork conference conclusions would give to further thinking on rural development policy and the evolution of the common agricultural policy, especially in view of the need to adjust that policy to take account of international trade pressures and the prospect of EU enlargement.

Arable Area Payments

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money his Department spent in each region of England in 1995–96 on *(a)* set-aside payments under the arable area scheme and *(b)* arable area payments. [4220]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* The table gives figures for each MAFF region for claims in respect of *(a)* set-aside and *(b)* total payments under 1995 arable area payments scheme. The amounts paid will have been slightly lower because of the reductions made for various reasons. As such reductions normally have to be calculated on the basis of the total claim, which may include land in more than one region, it is not possible to give figures for the total amounts paid on a regional basis.

Payments claimed under arable area payments scheme in 1995

	Set-aside payments £	*All arable area payments* £
Anglia	46,798,016	289,913,141
East Midlands	33,075,309	219,326,503
North East	25,841,703	167,203,491
Northern	6,084,999	42,205,946
North Mercia	7,747,702	51,869,608
South Mercia	13,348,438	83,637,294
South East	30,979,065	177,429,223
South West	4,115,287	30,112,184
Wessex	11,717,915	73,109,534

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what area of land was set aside in 1995–96 under the arable area scheme for each region of England. [4221]

Mr. Hogg *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* The areas of land set aside on which payments were made in each MAFF region under the 1995 arable area payments scheme were as follows:

	Hectare
Anglia	137,258
East Midlands	97,010
North East	75,794
Northern	17,847
North Mercia	22,724
South Mercia	39,151
South East	90,861
South West	12,070
Wessex	34,369

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many payments were made in England in 1995–96 for set-aside under the arable area scheme *(a)* between £0 and £5,000, *(b)* £5,001 and £10,000, *(c)* £10,001 and £15,000, *(d)* £15,001 and £20,000, *(e)* £20,001 and £25,000, *(f)* £25,001 and £50,000, *(g)* £50,001 and £75,000, *(h)* £75,001 and £100,000, *(i)* £100,001 and £150,000, *(j)* £150,001 and £200,000, *(k)* £200,001 and £250,000, *(l)* £250,001 and £300,000, *(m)* £300,001 and £350,000, *(n)* £350,001 to £400,000, *(o)* £400,001 and £450,000, *(p)* £450,001 and £500,000 and *(q)* over £500,000. [4223]

Mr. Hogg *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* The table sets out the number of set-aside payments made under the 1995 arable area payments scheme in the bands requested. Some claimants will have received more than one payment.

Set-aside payments in England banded by size of payment

Size band	*Number of payments*
£0 and £5,000	22,143
£5,001 and £10,000	6,934
£10,001 and £15,000	2,204
£15,001 and £20,000	977
£20,001 and £25,000	413
£25,001 and £50,000	37
£50,001 and £75,000	87
£75,001 and £100,000	23
£100,001 and £150,000	7
£150,001 and £200,000	2
£200,001 and £250,000	1
£250,001 and over	0

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information is collated centrally on *(a)* the long-term revenue commitments and *(b)* any other commitments arising as a result of private finance initiative projects agreed by (i) his Department and (ii) agencies accountable to his Department. [5088]

Mr. Boswell: The Government response to the Treasury Committee report on the private finance initiative agreed the importance of collecting and monitoring information on future spending commitments arising from contracts under the PFI. This is now being collected. The response stated that aggregate projections of the level of expenditure expected to arise from signed contracts under PFI would be published in the 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report."

Meat Processing Industry

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions his Department has had with Hillsdown Ambient Foods Group Ltd. relating to problems for the meat processing industry arising from the BSE crisis. [5048]

Mrs. Browning: My Department holds regular meetings with various trade organisations representing the meat processing industry, including the British Meat Manufacturers Association and the UK Association of Frozen Food Producers. Representatives from the Hillsdown Ambient Foods Group Ltd. have attended these meetings, which regularly discuss problems facing the meat processing industry arising from the market disruption caused by consumer concern about BSE.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Palestine (Aid)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much aid has been given to the Palestinian state since the devolution of power from Israel. [4916]

Dr. Liam Fox: The Palestinian Authority assumed responsibility for Gaza and Jericho in May 1994. Bilateral development assistance given to the west bank and Gaza for 1994–95 and 1995–96 was £8.9 million. Additionally, we provide approximately one sixth of the EC's 500 mecu—£417 million—aid to the Palestinians, pledged for 1994 to 1998.

Nigeria

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what are the time scale and objectives of the Commonwealth ministerial action group mission to Nigeria; [5039]

(2) what plans the Commonwealth ministerial action group mission has to meet *(a)* Moshood Abiola,*(b)* Olusegun Obasanjo and *(c)* Dr. Beko Ransome-Kuti; [5036]

(3) which political prisoners the Commonwealth ministerial action group mission to Nigeria has requested meetings with; and what response it has received from the Nigerian Government; [5037]

(4) if the Commonwealth ministerial action group mission's meetings with Nigerian political prisoners will be attended by Nigerian Government representatives; [5038]

(5) what guarantees the Commonwealth ministerial action group mission to Nigeria has received regarding access to political prisoners; [5042]

(6) what discussions the Commonwealth ministerial action group mission to Nigeria plans to have with the Nigerian Government regarding *(a)* the restoration of democracy and *(b)* human rights in Nigeria. [5040]

Dr. Liam Fox: The Commonwealth ministerial action group will visit Nigeria on 19 and 20 November. The group has been tasked to assess Nigeria's adherence to the Harare principles of good governance and make recommendations to the Commonwealth Heads of Government on its suspension from the association.

The group has been working to encourage the Nigerian authorities to take immediate steps to improve human rights, including the release of political prisoners, and to restore accountable civilian government. It has also requested meetings with a wide range of people, including Chief Moshood Abiola.

Middle East Aid

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much aid has been given to *(a)* Israel, *(b)* Egypt, *(c)* Jordan, *(d)* Lebanon and *(e)* Syria in each of the last five years. [4915]

Dr. Liam Fox: UK aid to Israel, Egypt, Jordan, the Lebanon and Syria has been provided on both a bilateral and a multilateral basis.

Bilateral expenditure

£ thousands

	Total ODA programme	*Total gross public expenditure*
Israel		
1991–92	13	13
1992–93	8	8
1993–94	8	8
1994–95	7	7
1995–96	10	13
Egypt		
1991–92	12,385	13,409
1992–93	7,606	8,833
1993–94	5,901	7,128
1994–95	4,884	6,123
1995–96	5,019	6,245
Jordan		
1991–92	3,122	3,122
1992–93	4,251	7,307
1993–94	4,209	4,209
1994–95	5,231	8,902
1995–96	5,902	10,877
Lebanon		
1991–92	182	182
1992–93	245	247
1993–94	264	316
1994–95	162	211
1995–96	219	219
Syria		
1991–92	3	3
1992–93	16	16
1993–94	30	30
1994–95	0	49
1995–96	16	36

ODA Programme contains Financial Aid, Technical Cooperation, Aid and Trade Provision, Programme Aid, Emergency Aid, Non Project Technical Cooperation and ODA Debt Relief.

GPEX consists ODA Programme plus CDC Investments and Other Debt relief and Drugs.

Multilateral expenditure

£ millions

	UK share of net oda disbursements
Israel	
1990	0.1
1991	3.2
1992	0.7
1993	0
1994	2.1
Egypt	
1990	5.1
1991	27.9
1992	7.8
1993	7.4
1994	17.5

Multilateral expenditure

£ millions

	UK share of net oda disbursements
Jordan	
1990	0.9
1991	18.9
1992	4
1993	4.7
1994	5.8
Lebanon	
1990	3
1991	0.8
1992	1.1
1993	1.9
1994	2.1
Syria	
1990	1.1
1991	0.2
1992	1
1993	0.5
1994	1.6

Source:
British Aid Statistics 1996 Edition OECD

Note:
1995–96 figures are provisional until publication of British Aid Statistics.
Multilateral aid consists UN, EC and other.

Aid Recipients

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the 10 countries receiving the largest amounts of United Kingdom aid in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [4831]

Dr. Liam Fox: The 10 countries receiving the largest amounts of development assistance in each of the last three years are as follows:

	£ million
1993–94	
India	102
Bangladesh	55
Former Yugoslavia	'52
Zambia	48
Pakistan	44
Zimbabwe	41
Uganda	40
Indonesia	35
Mozambique	35
China	34
1994–95	
India	100
Pakistan	80
Bangladesh	56
Zambia	56
Indonesia	51
Uganda	47
Former Yugoslavia	'46
Rwanda	45
Malawi	41
Zimbabwe	35
1995–96	
India	99
Bangladesh	48
Former Yugoslavia	'38
Indonesia	38

	£ million
Malawi	33
China	33
Uganda	32
Pakistan	32
Russia	31
Zambia	29

[1]Excluding technical co-operation to Slovenia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

At £2,154 million in 1996–97, British development assistance makes a substantial contribution to reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development. An increasing proportion of ODA's bilateral budget is concentrated on the poorest countries in Africa and south Asia who need assistance the most and can make the best use of it.

European Union Aid Budget

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the European Union budget commitment appropriation for (a) B7-5010, co-financing of development projects carried out by non-governmental organisations and public awarenesss campaigns, (b) B7-5050, aid for population policies and programmes in developing countries and (c) B7-5046, the fight against AIDS in developing countries in each year since 1993. [4896]

Dr. Liam Fox: The European Union budget commitment appropriations for each of the years 1993, 1994, 1995 and 1996 respectively were as follows (sterling equivalents, at today's exchange rate of £1 = 1.2785 ecu, shown in brackets):

Budget line	*Title*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
B7-6000 (was B7-5010)	Community contributions towards schemes concerning developing countries carried out by NGOs	135,000,000 ecu (£105,592,491)	145,000,000 ecu (£113,414,157)	162,500,000 ecu (£127,102,072)	174,000,000 ecu (£136,096,989)
B7-610 (was B7-5031)	Separate Budget Line for training and promotion of awarenesss on developing issues	2,000,000 ecu (£1,564,333)	2,000,000 ecu (£1,564,333)	3,000,000 ecu (£2,346,500)	4,000,000 ecu (£3,128,666)
B7-631 (was B7-5050)	Aid for population policies and programmes in developing countries	4,000,000 ecu (£3,128,666)	5,000,000 ecu (£3,910,833)	6,000,000 ecu (£4,692,999)	7,000,000 ecu (£5,475,166)
B7-6211 (was B7-5046)	Health programme and the fight against HIV/AIDS in developing countries	10,000,000 ecu (£7,821,666)	12,500,000 ecu (£9,777,082)	12,500,000 ecu (£9,777,082)	15,000,000 ecu (£11,732,499)

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funding was allocated for how many and for which projects for *(a)* B7-5010, co-financing of development projects carried out by non-governmental organisations and public awareness campaigns, *(b)* B7-5050, aid for population policies and programmes in developing countries and *(c)* B7-5046, the fight against AIDS in developing countries European Union budget lines in each year since 1993; and which NGOs and agencies are responsible for implementing these projects. [4897]

Dr. Fox: I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly.

TRANSPORT

European Union

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of his Department's time and resources are spent dealing with administrative and policy matters connected with British membership of the European Union. [4961]

Mr. Bowis: The Department has a European unit, devoted very largely to work connected to the European Union, which has a budget of just over £500,000. Beyond that, European Union matters are fully integrated into other policy and administration matters, and the sums of time and money spent in dealing with them cannot be disaggregated.

Walking

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reasons the national travel survey excludes consideration of distances covered on foot during employment. [4478]

Mr. Bowis: The primary purpose of the national travel survey is to estimate the demand for personal travel. This comprises travel for private purposes or for work or education, provided that the main reason for the journey is for the traveller himself or herself to reach the destination.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the information in the latest issue of the national travel survey in respect of walking. [4477]

Mr. Bowis: The 1993 to 1995 report on the national travel survey contained a number of tables showing the contribution of walking to figures for personal travel. The main section shows that the average number of journeys walked per person and the average distance walked have fallen over recent years and we have therefore set up a steering group to look at the causes of this and at ways that have been shown to be effective in encouraging walking. I have chaired the first two meetings of this group.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress of the national walking strategy. [4476]

Mr. Bowis: I have formed and chaired the first two meetings of a steering group whose membership comes from a range of interested parties. The group is drafting a discussion document which will invite comments from a wider constituency to help establish what measures may be commended as good practice to encourage walking as a mode of transport, as a component in journeys with public transport and as an alternative to the car for short journeys.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information is collated centrally on *(a)* the long-term revenue commitments and *(b)* any other commitments arising as a result of private finance initiative projects agreed by (i) his Department and (ii) agencies accountable to his Department. [5075]

Mr. Bowis: The Government response to the Treasury Committee report on the private finance initiative agreed the importance of collecting and monitoring information on future spending commitments arising from contracts under the PFI. This information is now being collected. As indicated in the Government's response, aggregate projections of the level of expenditure expected to arise from signed PFI contracts, including those in the transport sector, will be published in the 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report."

Speeding

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact of his recent television campaign on speeding on maximum and minimum speeds; and what other measures he plans to use to monitor the campaign's effect. [4479]

Mr. Bowis: The objective of the kill your speed campaign is to make driving too fast for the conditions—such as 40mph in a 30mph zone—as socially unacceptable as drink driving. That requires a long-term campaign to change entrenched social attitudes before behaviour can be affected.

Independent research shows a high awareness of the recent advertising with 65 per cent. of all drivers recalling the publicity. It also shows that just six months after the launch there has been a positive shift—from 42 per cent. to 50 per cent. in the proportion of drivers who felt that they could personally drive more slowly to avoid accidents. There has also been a positive shift in the perceived safe speed on residential roads.

The Department will continue to monitor the campaign with both quantitative research and consumer focus groups to evolve the message in the most effective way. We also monitor vehicle speed in residential and urban areas.

North-eastern and North-western Traffic Areas (Merger)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the transfer of work of the north-western traffic area office to the north-eastern traffic area office indicating which areas of operation will not be transferred. [5172]

Mr. Bowis: Detailed arrangements for handling the transfer of work from the north-western traffic area office in Manchester, which is closing next year, have not yet been finalised.

Disabled People (Access to Public Transport)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Members for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) and the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) of 28 October, *Official Report*, column *43*, when he expects to publish regulations and guidance under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in relation to access to public transport for disabled people. [5128]

Mr. Bowis: Discussions are being held with the transport industries and with the disabled persons transport advisory committee on the technical specifications for vehicle accessibility that will form the basis of the regulations.

We plan to publish our proposals for the taxi accessibility regulations early in the new year. Proposals for public service vehicles and for rail vehicles will follow shortly afterwards. There will be informal consultation with groups representing disabled people, industry and other interested parties at that time. This will cover both the content of the specifications and the timetable for implementation.

Once responses to this initial consultation have been taken into account, there will be a further formal period of consultation on the draft regulations.

Copies of all consultation documents will be placed in the Library as soon as they are published.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 31 October, *Official Report*, column *4*, if he will list for each rail franchise the administered profit included within the support paid to British Rail prior to franchising. [4145]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 14 November 1996]:* The amounts of administered profit are provided in the table.

£ million

	Support paid to BR prior to franchising	*Including administered profit*[1]
Gatwick Express	NIL	4.33
South Eastern Trains	138.92	18.34
LTS	34.50	3.85
Midland Main Line	16.76	6.68
Great Western	60.83	15.14
Thames	43.80	5.14
Cardiff Railway	22.20	0.70
South Wales and West	84.80	4.79
InterCity East Coast	74.74	19.43
Chiltern	18.56	2.33
Network SouthCentral	101.99	13.41
South West Trains	85.43	19.49
Island Line	2.56	0.14
Total	685.09	113.77

Note:
[1]figures are for 1996–97 except for SWT and GW, where the figures are for 1995–96.

A total of £88 million operating profit was generated by the 13 franchised from operating companies whilst they were in BR ownership in 1995–96. This was some £16 million below the budgeted level of administered profits.

TREASURY

Retirement Pensioners

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many persons receiving the basic retirement pension *(a)* pay income tax over the standard rate, *(b)* pay income tax at the standard rate and *(c)* pay no income tax; and in each case what is the percentage of the total. [3045]

Mr. Jack: Available information for 1996–97 is given in the following table and relates to individuals above state retirement age.

	Number in millions		*Percentage of total*	
Marginal tax rate	*Individuals aged 65 or over*	*Women aged 60 to 64*	*Individuals aged 65 or over*	*Women aged 60 to 64*
Higher rate	0.1	[1]—	1	1
Basic rate	1.2	0.2	13	18
Lower rate	1.7	0.4	19	25
No tax liability	6.3	0.8	67	56
Total	9.3	1.4	100	100

[1] Fewer than 50,000.

The estimates are based on information projected from 1994–95 survey of personal incomes and population estimates from the Government Actuary's Department; they are therefore provisional.

National Insurance

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people currently paying income tax are estimated to pay more, and how many are estimated to pay less, than their national insurance contributions, including employers' contributions on their behalf. [3053]

Mr. Jack: Estimates for 1996–97 are as follows:

Individuals paying income tax who:	*Number in millions*
Pay more tax than national insurance contributions[1]	10.7
Pay less tax than national insurance contributions[1]	10.1
Pay tax but do not pay national insurance contributions[1]	4.8
Total	25.6

[1]Includes both employee contributions and the corresponding employers' contributions. The estimates are based on information projected from the 1994–95 survey of personal incomes and are therefore provisional.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total amount spent by local government in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1990. [3104]

Mr. Waldegrave: In the financial year 1979–80, the total amount spent by local government, by national accounts definitions, was £26 billion. In the financial year 1990–91 the total amount spent by local government, by national accounts definitions, was £69 billion.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much funding for local government was provided by central Government for the current year; and what are the equivalent figures for the last year for which figures are available. [3105]

Mr. Waldegrave: For the financial year 1996–97, planned total central Government grants to local authorities in the United Kingdom totalled £62,060 million. For the financial year 1995–96 total central Government grants to local authorities in the Untied Kingdom were estimated at £61,979 million.

Taxation (Self-assessment)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what tests the Inland Revenue has made of its computer systems relating to the self-assessment of taxation; and if the results were successful. [3257]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:* EDS, the Inland Revenue's strategic partner, has worked with the Inland Revenue jointly to plan full testing of the computer system to support self-assessment. These tests included component, system, framework, integration and inter-system testing. They were supported by a full rehearsal of the system in local Inland Revenue offices during September. The system has been made available progressively from 4 November, since when it has been successfully available to local offices each day.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the extra *(a)* letters and *(b)* telephone calls the Inland Revenue is likely to receive as a result of the introduction of self-assessment. [3261]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:* The first self-assessment tax returns will be issued in April 1997. In the period to 31 March 1998 the Inland Revenue has planned to cope with up to 1.1 million letters and up to 11 million telephone calls which it expects to receive in relation to self-assessment.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the cost of new computer systems at the Inland Revenue to administer the self-assessment of taxation. [3258]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:* The computer system for self-assessment is being developed and implemented by EDS, the Inland Revenue's information technology partner. So far, the Inland Revenue has paid approximately £200 million for this service.

European Union Membership (Cost)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the net cost to the United Kingdom of membership of the European Union. [4093]

Mr. Oppenheim: Between joining the European Community in 1973 and the end of financial year 1995–96, the total United Kingdom public sector net contribution to the European Community Budget was £26.5 billion.

Spreadable Butter

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he was informed by the EC that New Zealand spreadable butter was not classified as butter. [4368]

Mr. Oppenheim: The head of the Agriculture Directorate General to the European Commission ruled in letter dated 27 June 1996 addressed to the Director of the European Court of Auditors that New Zealand spreadable butter did not meet the qualifying criteria for admission into the European Community at the reduced rate of customs duty. This correspondence was forwarded to HM Customs and Excise on 3 July 1996.

European Monetary Union

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the implementation of the stability pact which is proposed for stage III of EMU will require an amendment to the treaty of European union. [4394]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The proposed stability pact aims to spell out practical procedures for implementation of the excessive deficits procedure in article 104c of the Maastricht treaty. One element of the pact is a draft regulation based on article 104c(14) second subparagraph. Otherwise, no amendment or change to the provisions of the treaty is envisaged or required for the implementation of the pact.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what requirements in respect of a gross domestic product ceiling on member states' general Government debt are proposed for inclusion in the stability pact for EMU. [4393]

Mr. Clarke: The Commission's proposals for a stability pact were submitted to Parliament on 22 October 1996 and I submitted an explanatory memorandum on 31 October. The proposed stability pact aims to reinforce the operation of the excessive deficits procedure in article 104c of the Maastricht treaty. It does not aim to change the reference value for debt which is specified in protocol No.5 of the Maastricht treaty.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals in respect of budget disciplines have been made for *(a)* countries in monetary union and *(b)* countries outside the monetary union by (i) the European Commission and (ii) the German Government. [4367]

Mr. Clarke: The Commission's proposals for a stability pact were published on 16 October 1996 and submitted to Parliament on 22 October. I submitted an explanatory memorandum on 31 October. The idea of a stability pact has been under discussion since the German Government first proposed clarifying existing provisions in article 104c of the Maastricht treaty in November 1995. Proposals in the stability pact on fiscal discipline would affect only member states which participate in the single currency.

Energy-saving Materials (VAT)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the annual revenue cost to the Exchequer of reducing the rate of value added tax from 17.5 per cent. to 8 per cent. on energy-saving materials, manufactured for the purpose of *(a)* cavity wall insulation, *(b)* loft insulation, *(c)* underfloor insulation, *(d)* insulating hot water tanks, *(e)* insulating pipes and other plumbing fittings, *(f)* draught proofing, *(g)* controlling domestic heating systems, *(h)* external and internal wall cladding and (i) providing low emissivity glazing; and if he will make a statement. [4270]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is not available. The cost of reducing VAT on these products has been estimated by the Association for the Conservation of Energy a trade lobby group, at £10 million in a full year.

Personal Tax Allowance

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of *(a)* the cost in excess of indexation of raising the personal tax allowance to £4,000 per annum and *(b)* the number of employees who would be taken out of the PAYE system, in addition to those who would be exempted by indexation. [4468]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* The full year cost in 1997–98, after allowing for statutory indexation, of increasing the non-age personal allowance to £4,000 and increasing the age allowances by an equivalent amount would be about £980 million. This would take about 350,000 people out of income tax including employees, self-employed people and pensioners, compared with statutory indexation.

VAT Overpayments

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the cost of extending the allowable period for the reclaim of overpaid value added tax to *(a)* four years, *(b)* five years and *(c)* six years; and if he will make a statement. [4742]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 19 November 1996]:* Because, by its nature, overpaid value added tax is an unknown quantity until it is discovered and reclaimed, it is not possible to make reliable estimates.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Confederation of British Industry on the Government's plans to restrict the time period for reclaiming overpaid value added tax to three years while retaining the ability of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise to claim VAT underpaid over a six-year time period; what assessment he has made of the effects of such a policy on small and medium businesses; and if he will make a statement. [4741]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 19 November 1996]:* The CBI has made representations in writing and in the forum of the joint VAT consultative committee. Representatives of Customs and Excise and the Treasury also attended a special meeting organised by the CBI at which businesses were able to discuss their concerns about the proposed time limit on recovery of overpaid tax. I have taken careful note of the points raised and the impact of the proposal on all sectors of business.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what meetings there have been within the last two months between the head of the international and supply division of the VAT policy directorate of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and the European Commission, represented by the head of the VAT unit of DGXXI; if he will publish the minutes of these meetings; what advice was given by the Commission's representative to the United Kingdom Government on the subject of the time limits applying to the reclaiming of VAT for *(a)* taxpayers and *(b)* Her Majesty's Customs and Excise; and if he will make a statement. [4743]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 19 November 1996]:* The head of the international and supply division of the VAT policy directorate of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and the head of the VAT unit of DGXXI have met on several occasions in the last two months, most recently on 4 and 5 November. No formal minutes have been produced and the content of such bilateral discussions, which covered a range of issues, is regarded as confidential.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information is collated centrally on *(a)* the long-term revenue commitments and *(b)* any other commitments arising as a result of private finance initiative projects agreed by (i) his Department and (ii) his agencies. [5074]

Mr. Jack: The Government response to the Treasury Committee report on the private finance initiative agreed on the importance of collecting and monitoring information on future spending commitments arising from contracts under the private finance initiative. Such information is now being collected. The response stated that aggregate projections of the level of expenditure that is expected to arise from signed contracts under the initiative would be published in the 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report."

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Electricity Distribution Losses

Sir John Hannam: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will state the level of losses of electricity in the distribution system; and what variance there is between the regional companies. [4267]

Mr. Page: The level of losses for the regional electricity companies as a whole was 6.6 per cent. in 1995–96. There is regional variation which is caused by various factors including the physical aspects of each company's area. Individual companies' figures are commercially confidential, but range from just under 5 per cent. to nearly 9 per cent.

Working Time Directive

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make arrangements to publish the report of Professor Harrington relating to the working time directive. [4764]

Mr. Lang: As indicated in the reply by my right hon. Friend the then Minister of State for Employment to the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin) on 11 May 1994, *Official Report*, column *168*, the report could be published only after the case in the European Court of Justice had been concluded. Accordingly, I have now arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House.

Negligence

Mr. Waller: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will introduce legislation to prevent companies charged with negligence resulting in a fatality from going into liquidation in order to avoid standing trial. [4794]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Companies may be subject to criminal proceedings notwithstanding the fact that they have gone into liquidation. In cases of windng up by the court, leave of the court may be required to bring such proceedings, whilst in cases of voluntary winding up, although leave is not required the court has the power to restrain proceedings on the application of the liquidate. Accordingly, I have no plans to change the law in this area.

Timeshare (Scotland)

Mr. Stewart: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to apply the Misrepresentation Act 1967 to Scotland in respect of timeshares; and if he will make a statement. [5041]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have no plans to do so.

Oil Companies (Meetings)

Mr. Hutton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what occasions since 1979 Ministers met representatives of Century Oil Company Ltd., and BHP Petroleum Ltd. in their official capacity; what issues were raised at such meetings; and which Ministers attended. [4295]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* Neither my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade nor my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Energy have met representatives of Century Oil Company Ltd. or BHP Petroleum Ltd. in their present ministerial capacities. However, my right hon. and noble Friend has agreed to meet BHP Petroleum Ltd. on 29 November 1996.

I attended a reception on 9 May 1996 at the House of Commons to which I was invited by my right hon. Friend the Member for Conway (Sir W. Roberts) in conjunction with BHP Petroleum Ltd. This was a social engagement.

I understand that my predecessors met representatives of BHP Petroleum Ltd. on occasion to discuss matters of topical interest.

Patents (Human DNA Sequences)

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the number of patents for human DNA sequences issued by the European Patent Office indicating *(a)* the country of origin and *(b)* if the organisation applying for the patent was from the private or public sector. [4973]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 19 November 1996]:* The way patent information is recorded does not permit direct retrieval of the information requested. However, research indicates that the patents granted for human DNA sequences are made up as follows:

(a) The three main countries of origin are, in descending order, Japan, USA and Germany, with South Africa, Spain, UK, Israel and Australia following, again in descending order.

(b) Over 70 per cent. come from the private sector.

To complete a full analysis to answer the question would involve disproportionate cost.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many patents for human DNA sequences have been issued by *(a)* the British Patent Office and *(b)* the European Patent Office. [4972]

Mr. Taylor *[holding answer 19 November 1996]:* The way information on granted patents is recorded does not permit retrieval of the information requested but, following research, I believe that the number of patents issued for human DNA sequences by the British Patent Office is between 10 and 20, while the number issued by the European Patent Office is between 70 and 130. A fuller analysis could be achieved only at disproportionate cost.

Multi-fibre Arrangement

Mr. Madden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Bradford North, of 7 November, *Official Report,* column *704,* what action has been taken by Her Majesty's Government or is planned to ensure the exclusion of imports of woven wool fabrics from stage two of the European Union's phasing out of the multi-fibre arrangement; if the matter is subject to qualified majority voting; when final decisions will be taken; and if he will make a further statement. [5043]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 19 November 1996]:* A qualified majority of EU member states, including the United Kingdom, support a compromise proposal from the Irish presidency for stage 2 of the phasing out of the multi-fibre arrangement, which would exclude woven wool fabrics from liberalisation.

Radio Communications Agency

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the future of the Radio Communications Agency. [4306]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to the previous answers that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade gave on 17 June 1996, *Official Report,* columns *320–21* and on 24 July 1996, *Official Report,* column *481.* The White Paper "Spectrum Management into the 21st Century" and the agency revised framework document, both available in the Libraries of both Houses, clearly set out the position of the agency in the future. The situation has not changed since then and I am pleased to say that there has been a substantial and positive response to the White Paper.

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will give a breakdown by sector of *(a)* imports and *(b)* exports with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia since the lifting of sanctions in November 1995. [4775]

Mr. Nelson: The data are published monthly by HM Customs and Excise in Business Monitor MM20, "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom with countries outside the European Community (Extra–EC Trade)".

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on proposals to extend the terms of the European Union agricultural generalised system of preference scheme to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement. [4772]

Mr. Nelson: The European Commission is committed, under the terms of the new generalised system of preferences regulation for agricultural products, to bring forward a proposal to examine the application of the agricultural GSP arrangements that will apply from 1 January 1997 to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. No proposal has yet been received from the European Commission.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made in the planning of a promotional event to encourage trade with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. [4774]

Mr. Nelson: My Department has taken a number of initiatives to promote trade with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Theses include organising a successful major trade promotion event in London in June which coincided with the visit of the Federal Minister of Trade. Over 160 business representatives were present; my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim), the then Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State in this Department, was the UK keynote speaker. Last month, in association with the London chamber of commerce and industry, my Department mounted trade promotion events to coincide with the visits to the UK of the British ambassador to Belgrade and a trade delegation from Montenegro led by the Montenegrin Prime Minister. Both events were well attended. The ambassador also spoke at a series of events outside London organised by my Department to strengthen UK–Federal Republic of Yugoslavia trade and commercial links. Other events are planned for the future to build on the momentum already generated; these include a trade mission to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia early in 1997.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans there are for the European Union to conclude a trade agreement with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; and if the trade conditions of the 1982 trade and co-operation agreement between the European Community and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia will be extended to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. [4773]

Mr. Nelson: EU Foreign Ministers have agreed that trade and co-operation agreements can be concluded in due course with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and certain other countries in south-eastern Europe, subject to the fulfilment of political and economic conditions. The Commission is currently undertaking exploratory contacts with the countries concerned, including FRY.

The Commission has recently proposed to the Council that the trade preferences contained in the 1982 agreement, which have been operating since February 1992 following suspension in November 1991, should now be extended to cover FRY. This is welcomed by the Government.

Gas Cylinder Sales (Safety)

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures he proposes to take to ensure that companies which sell gas cylinder bottles are held responsible for their safe return. [4271]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 15 November 1996]:* There are voluntary arrangements, promoted by gas suppliers and by the Liquid Petroleum Gas Association and local authorities, to ensure the return of used liquid petroleum gas cylinders. I have no plans to introduce mandatory requirements.

SCOTLAND

Minimum Sentences

4. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the effects of his proposals to introduce minimum sentences in Scotland with particular reference to the safety of the public.[3462]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The proposals in the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill for automatic life sentences for repeat sexual or violent offenders and for a minimum sentence of seven years for a third conviction for trafficking in class A drugs demonstrate our determination to provide the public with the protection they deserve.

Tourism

13. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the increase in the level of tourism in Scotland since *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1993. [3471]

Mr. Kynoch: Comparative figures are not available but, since 1984, total visitor expenditure has increased by 51 per cent.

Local Government Finance

14. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the level of local authority spending per head in Scotland relative to the level in English local authorities. [3472]

Mr. Kynoch: Planned local authority spending per head of population in the current year is 32 per cent. higher in Scotland than in England.

23. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss local government finance. [3481]

38. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss the forthcoming revenue support grant settlement. [3496]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend and I met the convention on 8 November and a further meeting is planned for 17 January.

40. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what factors he takes into account when calculating housing capital allocations to local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [3498]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The distribution of available resources for council housing investment reflect an assessment of the relative housing need in each local authority area based on information which authorities provide on such factors as stock condition and homelessness. The allocations take account of the extent to which councils propose to address the national priority issues of condensation and dampness, below tolerable standard housing, homelessness and community care in their planned capital programmes, as well as the efficiency and effectiveness with which they utilise resources and work with Scottish Homes and other housing providers in meeting local needs. Account is also taken of the capacity of each authority to generate capital receipts, part of which can be used to support housing investment.

Beef Export Ban

15. **Mrs Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made towards lifting the ban on the export of beef cattle from Scotland. [3473]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Good progress is being made towards fulfilling the Florence pre-conditions, including elimination of the backlog under the over-30-months scheme in Scotland where some 140,000 animals have been slaughtered.

Sentencing Policy

16. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his proposals to make prisoners liable to serve the full terms of their sentences in Scotland. [3474]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill will ensure that sentences mean what they say. In future, prisoners will serve the full sentence of imprisonment pronounced by the court, subject to a small measure of early release—not exceeding 12 days every two months—depending on good behaviour in custody.

Hospital Trusts

17. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on proposed amalgamations of hospital trusts in Scotland. [3475]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are no current plans to alter the boundaries or re-configure any of the existing NHS trusts in Scotland.

Private Finance Initiative

18. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what private finance initiative schemes he has approved since their inception. [3476]

Mr. Kynoch: Private finance initiative schemes with an initial capital value of £70.4 million have been approved by my right hon. Friend or have been taken forward by health service bodies under delegated authority. These projects include the Skye bridge, clinical waste disposal facilities for Lothian, Forth and Northern health boards, the Law hospital health information system and the Ferryfield elderly care facility in Edinburgh. The balance is made up of smaller contracts for care beds, medical analysis equipment and clinical waste disposal.

Health Boards

19. **Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet the chairmen of the health boards to discuss finance. [3477]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend and I meet chairmen of health boards regularly to discuss matters of current interest including finance.

Frail Elderly People

20. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number of frail elderly people in Scotland who will require NHS hospital beds in the year 2000. [3478]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The level of NHS bed provision and the organisation of community health and social services for the frail elderly are determined by continuous joint assessment of local needs involving health boards and local authorities.

The aim is to secure the most effective package of services both in hospital and in the community which meets current and future needs.

Crimes

21. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many crimes were committed in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* the last year for which figures are available. [3479]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the number of crimes committed is not available. The number of crimes recorded by the police in Scotland was 346,680 in 1979 and 502,802 in 1995. The results of the Scottish crime survey, a household survey of people's experience of crime, indicate that, between 1981 and 1992 actual crimes increased by only 4 per cent. compared with a 52 per cent. increase in comparable recorded crime over the same period.

Secondary Schools (Expenditure)

22. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent per pupil in secondary schools in Scotland in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what the figure was in 1978–79, at constant prices. [3480]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Current expenditure per secondary pupil in 1994–95 was £2,874. That is 37 per cent. higher in real terms than in 1979.

Dangerous Criminals

24. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to produce measures to protect the public from dangerous criminals. [3482]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government are determined to protect the public from dangerous criminals. We have produced several new measures to achieve this in the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, the most important of which is the automatic life sentence which will apply on conviction for a second serious sexual or violent offence.

Convicted Offenders (Early Release)

25. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his Department's proposals in respect of the automatic early release of convicted offenders. [3483]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We will abolish automatic early release in the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill. In future, early release of prisoners will be dependent on their behaviour in custody and will be limited to a maximum of 12 days every two months.

Devolution

26. **Sir Michael Grylls:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the report prepared by the Confederation of British Industry in Scotland on the subject of devolution in Scotland. [3484]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I welcome the detailed consideration given by the CBI to this important debate. It is clear that the business community recognises the damage that would be done to the Scottish economy by tampering with the present constitutional arrangements.

Public Spending

27. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on public spending by central Government per capita in Scotland. [3485]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral answer given earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen).

River Clyde (Pollution)

28. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the cost of cleaning up pollution in the River Clyde in the last six months. [3486]

Mr. Kynoch: No major pollution incidents affecting the River Clyde have been reported to the Scottish Office in the last six months.

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency does not hold comprehensive data on the cost of general clean-up of lower level pollution in specific rivers or catchments.

Cattle Cull

29. **Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress is being made with the BSE cull; and if he will make a statement. [3487]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The selective cull is on hold while the new scientific evidence is considered, but of course many animals will have been slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme which would have been identified under the selective cull.

Salmon Farming

30. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives from the Scottish Salmon Growers' Association to discuss the salmon farming industry in Scotland. [3488]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I met a wide range of industry representatives at this year's Scottish fish farming conference on 2 October and have maintained regular contact with senior representatives of the industry since then.

Inward Investment

31. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what investment from abroad has been attracted to Scotland over the last 12 months. [3489]

Mr. Kynoch: Our continuing success in attracting inward investment to Scotland includes announcements during the past 12 months by DuPont, Seiko, Simple Technology, Nikon, Shin Ho Tech, Appryl, Quintiles, Lite-On Technology Corporation, Allied Precision Company, Bermo, Rohr Incorporated, Smart Incorporated and Hyundai among many others.

36. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about inward investment in Scotland. [3494]

Mr. Kynoch: Inward investment in Scotland has been running at record levels over the past two years and this success is continuing. Firms like Hyundai, Chunghwa, Lite-On, Quintiles and Rohr recognise that locating in Scotland means locating in one of Europe's most competitive business locations.

Self-financing Regulatory Organisations

32. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will review the powers of self-financing regulatory organisations in Scotland. [3490]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend is not aware of any bodies in Scotland for which he has responsibility which fit the description of self-financing regulatory organisations.

Knives (Assaults)

33. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many assaults with knives there have been in Scotland in each of the last five years. [3491]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the written answer that I gave him on 15 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *380*.

New Community Hospital, Hawick

34. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects contracts to be awarded for construction on the proposed new community hospital for Hawick; and if he will make a statement. [3492]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The award of the contract for construction of the proposed new community hospital at Hawick is a matter for Borders Community Health Services NHS trust.

Maternity Care (Lanarkshire)

35. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received concerning maternity care in Lanarkshire; and if he will make a statement. [3493]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have received written representations from the Royal College of Midwives and three others.

Lanarkshire health board's on-going public consultation on its proposals for the reprovision of maternity and related services will continue until 9 December 1996. No final decisions have yet been taken.

NHS Chairmen and Chief Executives

37. **Ms Rachel Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the *(a)* cost and *(b)* purpose of the recent two-day meeting between NHS chairmen and chief executives. [3495]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am not aware of such a meeting having been held.

Homelessness

39. **Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received on levels of homelessness in Scotland. [3497]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Most recent representations on homelessness have been in connection with the consultation on a draft code of guidance on homelessness, to which just over 140 organisations and individuals responded.

SCOTLAND

Alcohol

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* people and *(b)* children under the age of 18 years have been diagnosed as alcoholics in Scotland in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [4412]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information required is not available centrally. However, information on hospitalisation for those patients aged under 18 and those 18 and over who have been discharged with an alcohol dependence syndrome[1] during the last five years is set out in the following table:

Year	*<18*	*18+*	*Total*
1991	31	3,535	3,566
1992	20	4,167	4,187
1993	13	4,609	4,622
1994	14	5,169	5,183
1995	16	5,966	5,982

[1] "Hospitalisations" refer to in-patient and day case discharges from non-obstetric/non-psychiatric NHS hospitals in Scotland. Out-patient attendances, accident and emergency attendances and general practitioner consultations are excluded from the table. Diagnoses are coded to the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Diseases 9th revision, ICD.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* people and *(b)* children under the age of 18 have been prosecuted for alcohol-related crime in Scotland in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [4407]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information is not collected centrally on the number of prosecutions for alcohol-related crime. The available information is given in the table. Children under the age of 16 would usually be dealt with by the children's hearing system rather than the courts for such offences.

Number of persons aged under 18 proceeded against where the main offence related to the purchase, consumption or possession of alcohol

Year	*Number of persons aged under 18*
1990	70
1991	122
1992	28
1993	27
1994	23

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prosecutions for selling *(a)* alcohol and *(b)* alco–pops to under-age children have taken place in Scotland in each of the last five years; what proportion of prosecutions have involved sales from (i) public houses, (ii) off licences, (iii) supermarkets and (iv) other outlets; and if he will make a statement. [4403]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The available information is given in the table.

Persons proceeded against where the main offence was sale of alcohol to persons under 18 years old

Year	*Number*
1990	134
1991	151
1992	80
1993	77
1994	81

M77 Extension

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the impact of the extension of the M77 on the economies of *(a)* Renfrewshire and *(b)* Ayrshire. [4262]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish Office carried out the standard cost-benefit analysis of the M77 extension, which revealed that the proposal offered good value for money. In addition, Renfrewshire Enterprise and Enterprise Ayrshire have each prepared economic assessments of aspects of the project. The results of these assessments indicate that the development of the route offers real economic opportunities for neighbouring communities. The local enterprise companies will be looking to exploit those opportunities when the Drumbreck-Malletsheugh section of the M77 opens shortly.

Tayside Community Business

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the failure rate of firms funded with public money by Tayside Community Business; and if he will make a statement. [4281]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has received two representations about Tayside Community Business. The issues raised are under considerations at present and replies will be sent as soon as possible.

Electoral Divisions

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will name the *(a)* local authority and *(b)* new parliamentary constituency for each local authority electoral division. [4751]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table.

Local authority areas showing component electoral wards and parliamentary constituencies

Local authority area	*Component electoral wards*	*Parliamentary constituency*
Aberdeen City	1–12, 19–20, 23–24	Aberdeen, North
	13–18, 21–22, 25–28, 31–34	Aberdeen, Central
	29–30, 35–50	Aberdeen, South
Aberdeenshire	1–4, 7–18, 21–24, 35–47	Banff and Buchan
		West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine
	5–6, 19–20, 25–34	Gordon (part)
Angus	1–10, 15–18, 23–26	Angus (part)
	11–14, 19–22	North Tayside (part)
Argyll and Bute	1–27	Argyll and Bute
	28–33	Dumbarton (part)
Clackmannanshire	1–12	Ochil (part)
Dumfries and Galloway	1–32	Galloway and Upper Nithsdale
	33–70	Dumfries
Dundee City	1–8, 13(pt), 14–15, 16(pt), 17(pt), 18, 19(pt), 20(pt), 21–22	Dundee, West
	9–12, 23–26, 27(pt), 28, 29(pt), 30–34, 35(pt), 36(pt)	Dundee, East
	13(pt), 16(pt), 17(pt), 19(pt), 20(pt), 27(pt), 29(pt), 35(pt), 36(pt)	Angus (part)
East Ayrshire	1–20	Kilmarnock and Loudoun
	21–30	Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (part)
East Dunbartonshire	1–5	Clydebank and Milngavie (part)
	6–25	Strathkelvin and Bearsden
	26	Coatbridge and Chryston (part)
East Lothian	1–3	Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (part)
	4–18	East Lothian
East Renfrewshire	1—20	Eastwood
Edinburgh, City of	1–2, 25–26, 41–44, 51–52	Edinburgh, Pentlands
	3–8, 13–14, 23–24	Edinburgh, West
	9–12, 17–22	Edinburgh, North and Leith
	15–16, 27–34	Edinburgh, Central
	35–40, 57–58	Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (part)
	45–50, 53–56	Edinburgh, South
Falkirk	1–10, 21–24, 27–30	Falkirk, West
	11–20, 25–26, 31–36	Falkirk, East
Fife	1–10, 13–20	Dumfermline, West
	11–12, 21–34, 73—74	Dunfermline, East
	35–52	Kirkcaldy
	53–72	Central Fife
	75–92	North-East Fife

Local authority areas showing component electoral wards and parliamentary constituencies

Local authority area	*Component electoral wards*	*Parliamentary constituency*
Glasgow, City of	1–9	Glasgow, Anniesland
	10–15, 19–21	Glasgow, Kelvin
	16–18, 22–27	Glasgow, Maryhill
	28–36	Glasgow, Springburn
	37–39, 43–45, 73–75	Glasgow, Shettleston
	40–42, 46–51	Glasgow, Baillieston
	52–57, 70–72	Glasgow, Govan
	58–66	Glasgow, Pollok
	67–69, 76–81	Glasgow, Cathcart
	82–83	Glasgow, Rutherglen (part)
Highland	1–15, 22–24	Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross
	16–21, 25–34, 37–42, 44, 49	Ross, Skye and Inverness, West
	35–36, 43, 45–48, 50–72	Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber
Inverclyde	1–5	West Renfrewshire (part)
	6–20	Greenock and Inverclyde
Midlothian	1–3	Tweedale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (part)
	4–15	Midlothian
Moray	1–14, 17–18	Moray
	15–16	Gordon (part)
North Ayrshire	1–15	Cunninghame, South
	16–30	Cunninghame, North
North Lanarkshire	1–15	Motherwell and Wishaw
	16–20, 41–50	Airdrie and Shotts
	21–30	Hamilton, North and Bellshill (part)
	31–40, 66–69	Coatbridge and Chryston (part)
	51–65	Cumbernauld and Kilsyth
Orkney Islands	1–28	Orkney and Shetland (part)
Perth and Kinross	1–18	Perth
	19–29	North Tayside (part)
	30–31	Ochil (part)
	32	Angus (part)
Renfrewshire	1–5, 16–20, 26–30	Paisley, North
	6–15, 21–25	Paisley, South
	31–40	West Renfrewshire (part)
Scottish Borders	1–10, 15–16, 29–46	Roxburgh and Berwickshire
	11–14, 17–28, 47–58	Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (part)
Shetland Islands	1–26	Orkney and Shetland (part)
South Ayrshire	1–10, 16–20	Ayr
	11–15, 21–25	Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (part)

Local authority areas showing component electoral wards and parliamentary constituencies

Local authority area	*Component electoral wards*	*Parliamentary constituency*
South Lanarkshire	1–16, 57–61	Clydesdale
	17–36	East Kilbride
	37–41, 47–56	Hamilton, South
	42–46	Hamilton, North and Bellshill (part)
	62–74	Glasgow, Rutherglen (part)
Stirling	1–12, 15–16, 19–22	Stirling
	13–14, 17–18	Ochil (part)
West Dunbartonshire	1–11	Clydebank and Milngavie (part)
	12–22	Dumbarton (part)
West Lothian	1–12	Linlithgow
	13–27	Livingston
Western Isles	1–30	Western Isles

Environmental Auditing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the ways in which his Department has *(a)* demonstrated by example and *(b)* promoted externally, the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing; and if he will make a statement. [4530]

Mr. Kynoch: The Scottish Office has a responsibility for most aspects of the environment in Scotland, which figures as an important consideration in a wide range of Scottish policies and programmes. In these areas, a variety of procedures and processes is used to ensure that decisions are reached giving full weight to the commitments made in the White Papers "Sustainable Development: The UK Strategy", Cm 2246, 1994, and the environment White Paper "This Common Inheritance", Cm 1200, 1990. It is a fundamental objective of the Government to secure a prosperous economy for Scotland, building on and having regard for its considerable natural resources and heritage.

Within its own estate, the Scottish Office has initiated an environmental auditing procedure in accordance with ISO 14001 accreditation criteria at its largest building, Victoria Quay, in Edinburgh.

Environmental management procedures piloted at Victoria Quay have refined existing work practices. Further development of waste management and energy efficiency policies will, collectively, result in an overall improvement in environmental performance across the estate, providing additional economic and social benefits, while maintaining staff welfare and comfort.

The efficiency and effectiveness of business in Scotland is assisted through environmental audit consultancy services such as the European Community econ-management and auditing scheme sponsored by the Department of the Environment and is promoted by Scottish Office staff through a regional network.

Promotion of the economic benefits to come from environmental auditing and related processes is a matter largely for the enterprise network of Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the local enterprise companies. For example, the Scottish Office has worked with Scottish Natural Heritage, a number of local enterprise companies and enterprise trusts and KPMG to sponsor the centre for environment and business in Scotland to produce a catalogue of case studies of good environmental management in companies of all types and sizes.

The environmental technology best practice programme run in partnership with the Department of Trade and Industry concentrates on waste minimisation and cost-effective cleaner technology providing services direct to business. The energy efficiency best practice programme, part of the Government effort to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, has enabled companies in Scotland, as elsewhere, to reduce their emissions while at the same time making substantial reductions in their energy costs. The Clyde waste minimisation project run by the Glasgow development agency with Dunbartonshire Enterprise, Renfrewshire Enterprise and Enterprise Ayrshire, is another example which has enabled a range of companies to reduce their costs while at the same time bringing benefits to the environment.

Police Complaints (Injuries)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people have officially complained about injuries they have suffered allegedly at the hands of police officers in Scotland in the last two years. [4577]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is not available in the form requested. The number of complaints of alleged assaults by police officers against members of the public which have been received by the police are as follows:

Year	*Number of alleged assaults*
1995	1,010
1996	612

Court Waiting Time

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what statistics his Department collates on the interval between a charge being made by the police and appearance in court by the accused for different offences in different parts of Scotland. [4725]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The statistics requested are not collated by the Scottish Office. It is not always necessary for the police to charge an accused before reporting that accused to the procurator fiscal for consideration for prosecution.

Police Custody (Deaths)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for those who have died in police custody in Scotland in the last two years (i) the location of their death, (ii) the reasons for the deaths ascertained so far, and (iii) what action was taken in respect of the police officer involved; and if he will make a statement. [4576]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the location of and reason for death in respect of persons who have died in police custody or otherwise with the

police in Scotland since November 1994 is set out in the table. All such deaths are thoroughly investigated by an appointed senior police officer and reported to the procurator fiscal, who decides whether any criminal proceedings are warranted. In all cases where a person dies in legal custody, the Fatal Accidents and Sudden Deaths Inquiry (Scotland) Act 1976 requires a fatal accident inquiry to be held, in which all the circumstances surrounding the death are subject to examination.

Location of death	*Reason for death*
Kilmarnock police station	Acute fatty infiltration of liver. Toxic effects of alcohol.
Southern general hospital, Glasgow	Sub-dural haemorrhage.
Southern general hospital, Glasgow	Head injury.
Levenmouth police station, Methil	Head injuries. Probable alcohol-related fall.
Gorbals police station, Glasgow	Hanging.
Kilbirnie police station, Glasgow	Head injury with brain damage. Fractured skull.
Motherwell police station	Acute haemorrhagic pancreatitis. Chronic alcoholism.
Edinburgh royal infirmary	Fatal dose of dihydrocodeine in liver. Toxic dose of dihydrocodeine in blood.
Oban police station	Acute pulmonary congestion and oedema.
Dalkeith police station	Acute alcohol intoxication, hypertensive heart disease and coronary atheroma.
Motherwell police station	Pulmonary oedema and congestion.
Western general hospital, Edinburgh	Blunt force head injury; haemophilia.
Kirkcaldy police station	Hanging.
Hawick police station	Inhalation of gastric contents; acute intoxication with alcohol.
Aberdeen royal infirmary	Heart attack.
Southern general hospital, Glasgow	Head injury/fall.
The Victoria infirmary, Glasgow	Hanging.
Aberdeen royal infirmary	Myocardial infarction (heart attack).
Southern general hospital, Glasgow	Head injury.
Inverclyde royal hospital, Greenock	Head injury/fall.
Glasgow royal infirmary	Pulmonary oedema and congestion.
Edinburgh royal infirmary	Undetermined, pending further laboratory investigations.
Foresterhill hospital, Aberdeen	Ischaemic heart disease.
Glasgow royal infirmary	Not yet known.

Housing Associations

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he is taking to encourage transfer of local authority housing stock to housing associations. [3718]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Earlier this year, the Scottish Office issued draft guidance on housing stock transfers to local authorities and other interested parties for comments. The comments received are currently being considered and the final guidance will be issued shortly.

Over the summer, in meetings with housing conveners of Scottish local authorities, I encouraged them to examine the benefits that housing transfers can offer. Scottish Office officials have also been available to discuss the implications of stock transfer with individual authorities.

In addition, a working group has been set up to look at the regulation and monitoring of new social landlords, such as local housing companies. The group, which comprises representatives from Scottish Homes, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland and funders, is due to hold its first meeting in early December.

Education Buildings

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much capital expenditure local authorities have been permitted to make on education buildings in Scotland *(a)* in real and *(b)* constant prices; and how much has been spent in (i) real and (ii) constant prices in each year since 1979. [4443]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information requested is given in the tables.

Capital allocations for educational building from 1979–80

£000's

Year	*At out-turn prices*	*At 1995–96 prices*
1979–80	53,605	137,371
1980–81	56,678	122,757
1981–82	62,213	122,861
1982–83	53,669	98,940
1983–84	45,755	80,611
1984–85	40,310	67,621
1985–86	50,275	79,955
1986–87	47,480	73,299
1987–88	53,175	77,941
1988–89	61,315	84,235
1989–90	65,555	84,181
1990–91	62,619	74,465
1991–92	73,291	81,909
1992–93	85,647	91,853
1993–94	78,489	81,826
1994–95	72,989	74,755
1995–96	69,258	69,258

1. Within the total capital allocations made to authorities, allocations applying to specific programmes are advisory and do not restrict to that figure.

2. The total allocations for educational building include elements for further education from 1979–80 to 1992–93, and community education from 1985–86 onwards.

3. These figures include supplementary allocations where appropriate.

4. As from 1996–97 authorities are given a single allocation covering all their non-housing capital programmes. An advisory for educational building is not separately identified.

Capital expenditure for educational building from 1979–80

£000s

Year	At out-turn prices	At 1995–96 prices
1979–80	52,926	135,631
1980–81	55,799	120,853
1981–82	64,283	126,949
1982–83	58,159	107,217
1983–84	52,825	93,067
1984–85	51,429	86,273
1985–86	57,522	91,480
1986–87	55,150	85,140
1987–88	59,414	87,085
1988–89	74,102	101,802
1989–90	81,593	104,776
1990–91	78,284	93,093
1991–92	82,046	91,693
1992–93	100,860	108,168
1993–94	104,609	109,056
1994–95	121,942	124,892
1995–96	Not yet available	Not yet available

1. Compiled from local authority financial returns.

2. The figures include expenditure on further education from 1979–80 to 1992–93, and community education from 1985–86.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what assessment he has made of the number of schools in a seriously sub-standard condition in Scotland and of the amount of money needed to repair them; [4444]

(2) what research he has conducted into the physical condition of schools in Scotland; and what conclusions were reached; [4448]

(3) how many replacement schools are currently being constructed in Scotland; and where. [4449]

Mr. Robertson: The overall management of school buildings is a matter for individual education authorities. Detailed information on the physical condition of schools, or on the progress of individual school building projects, is not held centrally.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been spent on school buildings in Scotland under the private finance initiative. [4445]

Mr. Robertson: There has been no such expenditure to date.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which school building projects in Scotland are currently being considered for financing through the private finance initiative. [4446]

Mr. Robertson: My right hon. Friend is aware that the following authorities are actively considering the following school building projects through the private finance initiative.

Falkirk council: refurbishment of Bo'ness academy; refurbishment of a group of schools including Graeme, Woodlands and Larbert high schools;

Stirling council: replacement of Balfron high school;

Aberdeenshire council: construction of new Garioch academy;

East Renfrewshire council: the extension of St. Ninian's high school; construction of new primary school in Newton Mearns.

However, he does not collect systematically information from local authorities about school building projects which they may be exploring under the private finance initiative. Authorities are likely therefore to have a number of other projects at earlier stages of consideration.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from *(a)* the finance industry and *(b)* the construction industry about the usefulness of the private finance initiative for school building; and what those representations were. [4447]

Mr. Robertson: Scottish Office Ministers have had frequent contacts with members of the construction and financial services industries concerning progress with the private finance initiative since its launch in 1992. We welcome constructive ideas from the private sector and encourage local authorities to explore the option of the initiative for suitable projects in all areas of public service for which they have responsibility.

South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what stage the recruitment process for the chief executive of the South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS trust has now reached; how much has been spent on this exercise by the trust; which outside agencies have been appointed to assist in the recruitment process; and when an appointment will be made. [5052]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The closing date for applications was 15 November 1996. The only costs have been in advertising the post. No agencies have been appointed by the trust to assist in the recruitment process. The trust expects that an appointment will be made by the latter part of December 1996.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to suspend the recruitment of the chief executive of the South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS trust pending a review of the provision of acute medical services by NHS trusts in Ayrshire. [5053]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. The recruitment process is a matter for the trust.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland who is currently carrying out the duties of the chief executive of the South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS trust. [5055]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Mr. Lindsay C. Tolland is the current acting chief executive.

Acute Medical Services (Ayrshire)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to carry out a review of the current provision of acute medical services within the Ayrshire and Arran health board area with a view to the creation of a single acute NHS trust for Ayrshire. [5054]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have no plans to do so. The organisation of health provision is a matter for the health board and the NHS trusts to agree in accordance with their shared assessment of health needs for the area.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions have taken place between the Scottish Office, the Ayrshire and Arran health board and the South and North Ayrshire NHS trusts relating to the amalgamation of the existing acute NHS trusts to provide a single acute service NHS trust for Ayrshire and Arran. [5050]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There have been no such discussions.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations the Scottish Office has received in the last three years in respect of the creation of a single acute NHS trust for the Ayrshire and Arran area. [5051]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The only written representations received were from the hon. Member on 27 July and 3 September 1994. The hon. Member also raised the matter during the Scottish Grand Committee debate in Ayr on 10 June 1996.

Kilwinning Plant Closure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what types of financial assistance have been given to *(a)* Robert Wilson and Sons Ltd., *(b)* Hillsdown Ambient Foods Group Ltd. and *(c)* their subsidiary companies by his Department during the last five years. [5046]

Mr. George Kynoch: None. An offer of regional selective assistance was made to Robert Wilson and Sons (Est. 1849) Ltd. in March 1995 to assist the installation of new machinery to improve produce quality and to help the company to develop into new markets; however, none of this grant has been claimed.

HEALTH

Edgware General Hospital

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the running costs of the minor accident treatment service unit at Edgware general hospital. [3906]

Mr. Malone: The running costs of the minor accident treatment service at Edgware general hospital include overhead costs shared with the accident and emergency department. It is therefore not possible to disaggregate the accurate full costs of the present minor accident treatment service facility.

Dentists (Sunderland)

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* general dental practitioners and *(b)* community dental practitioners practise dentistry in Sunderland health authority's area. [4417]

Mr. Malone: The information is contained in the table:

General dental service and community dental service: number of general dental practitioners[1 2 3] at 30 June 1996 and community dentists[4] at 30 September 1995 in Sunderland health authority

Number of general dental practitioners[1 2 3] at 30 June 1996	Number of community dentists[4 5] whole-time equivalent, at 30 September 1995
88	10

[1] The number of dentists (principals) on the health authority list and their assistants and vocational trainees.
[2] Some dentists have a contract with more than one health authority. All dentists in Sunderland are included.
[3] Excludes hospital dentists.
[4] Figure for community dentists is whole time equivalent and represents the number of staff allocated by Sunderland health commission, priority Healthcare Wearside NHS trust and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS trust.
[5] Figure is rounded to the nearest 10.

Mental Illness

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of a recent report by the World Health Organisation into the extent of mental illness; and if he will make a statement. [4754]

Mr. Burns: I welcome "Mental Illness in General Health Care", edited by T. B. Üstün and N. Sartorious. It is a very useful contribution to our understanding of the importance of primary health care in the development of mental health services. We are already taking a number of steps to improve the ability of general practitioners to understand, diagnose and manage mental illness.

HIV and AIDS

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the amount allocated for HIV treatment in each NHS trust. [4716]

Mr. Horam: National Health Service trusts receive no central funding for HIV treatment. Funding for HIV treatment, together with all other income, is included in contracts with purchasers.

Environmental Auditing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the ways in which his Department has *(a)* demonstrated by example and *(b)* promoted externally, the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing; and if he will make a statement. [4526]

Mr. Horam: Internally, the Department operates an effective energy and environment action plan which promotes all aspects of green housekeeping and which is regularly reviewed. Additionally, major energy audits of three of the main London buildings were recently undertaken and the majority of recommendations have already been implemented. Externally, contractors for building and office services are required to demonstrate their own environmental policies when invited to tender and their environmental performance is included in our assessment of their tenders.

Guidance to the national health service encourages it to engage in pro-environmental measures and to ensure that the environment is given thorough consideration in the development of policies at all levels. For example the NHS's old inefficient incinerators have been closed down

and replaced with fewer, modern installations which fully comply with the Environmental Protection Act 1990. As part of the target to reduce energy consumption and stabilise carbon dioxide emissions, the NHS has introduced some 200 combined heat and power installations to make more efficient use of fossil fuel, and one of these provided this Department's case study example in response to the United Kingdom round table on sustainable development.

In 1996, NHS Estates—an executive agency of the Department of Health—introduced an award for the "best environmental initiative" in its health care estate management awards.

Fostering and Adoption

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce legislation on fostering and adoption in the current Session. [4511]

Mr. Burns: The Government will introduce adoption legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows. There are no plans to revise fostering legislation at this time.

Prescriptions

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the (i) percentage and (ii) amount of the NHS prescription charge received on each prescription by pharmacists in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1984, *(c)* 1987, *(d)* 1992 and *(e)* 1996. [4506]

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table.

Year	*Average prescription charge as a percentage of average total cost per prescription*	*Average total cost per prescription* £	*Average prescription charge during the year (see note 2)* £
1979	13	2.43	0.31
1984	35	4.39	1.55
1987	43	5.46	2.35
1992	48	7.60	3.66
1995	60	8.57	5.13

[1] The data used are obtained from the Prescription Pricing Authority PD1 series of forms and cover all prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors in England. The number of prescriptions are based on fees.

[2] The prescription charges used to obtain the average prescription charge during each year was as follows:
1979 : 1 January to 15 July—£0.20, 16 July to 31 December—£0.45; 1984 : 1 January to 31 March—£1.40, 1 April to 31 December—£1.60; 1987 : 1 January to 31 March—£2.20, 1 April to 31 December—£2.40; 1992 : 1 January to 31 March—£3.40, 1 April to 31 December—£3.75; 1995 : 1 January to 31 March—£4.75, 1 April to 31 December—£5.25.

[3] Information for 1996 is not yet available.

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of all NHS prescriptions issued in Sheffield in the last 12 months for which figures are available were free of charge; and if he will make a statement. [4832]

Mr. Malone: In the area covered by the Sheffield family health services authority, 85 per cent. of prescription items were dispensed free of charge to patients in 1995.

Miss Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the future of resale price maintenance for prescription medicines. [4505]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

Resale price maintenance is unlawful under the Resale Prices Act 1976, subject to the possibility of exemption by the restrictive practices court on public interest grounds. The Director General of Fair Trading announced on 18 October that he was seeking leave of the court to apply for a discharge of its 1970 order in respect of resale price maintenance on ethical and proprietary medicines. If leave is given, it will be for the court to decide whether the 1970 order remains in the public interest. The Secretary of State has no statutory role or discretion in relation to the director-general's application or in relation to the court's consideration of the case.

Limb Lane Secure Unit

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Limb Lane secure unit in Sheffield. [4830]

Mr. Burns: The Limb Lane unit is a new eight-place secure unit for children. It is being constructed by Sheffield city council and funded by a grant from the Department of Health. It is part of the national secure accommodation development programme, which will provide an additional 170 places by the middle of next year. The unit is expected to be completed early in the new year.

Water Disconnection

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will collate centrally information on families that have contracted a disease due to their supply of domestic water being cut off; and if he will make a statement. [5142]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Paediatric Intensive Care Beds

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many extra *(a)* general and specialist paediatric intensive care beds and *(b)* high dependency beds are to be provided this year; and if he will list their locations. [4805]

Mr. Horam: The chief executive of the national health service executive reported earlier this year on plans to increase the provision of beds for critically ill children and gave their location by region. Copies of this report, "Paediatric Intensive Care", which was published on 29 May, are in the Library. Most of these additional beds are scheduled to open this year; many are now available and the others will open shortly.

Learning Disabilities

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total resource allocation for learning disabilities and its percentage of the local budget in each of the last five years. [4807]

Mr. Burns: There is no specific allocation for services for people with learning disabilities. Health authorities are given general allocations for hospital and community health services to purchase health care services for their resident population.

Homicides and Suicides (Inquiries)

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many confidential inquiries into homicides and suicides have been undertaken in each of the last five years; and what plans he has to publish an analysis of the results of these inquiries. [4808]

Mr. Burns: The confidential inquiry into homicides and suicides by mentally ill people was set up in 1991, funded by the Department and undertaken by the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Two reports have been published: "A Preliminary Report on Homicides", in August 1994, analysed 22 cases of homicides; and the "Report of the Confidential Inquiry into Homicides and Suicides by Mentally Ill People", in January 1996, analysed 39 cases of homicide and 240 cases of suicide. Both these reports are available in the Library.

Registered Homes

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accidents have taken place in homes registered under the Registered Homes Act 1984, broken down by category of home in each of the last five years. [4810]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not available centrally.

District Health Authorities

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his oral answer of 12 March 1996, *Official Report*, column 774, concerning capitation formula, what was the date of the latest revision of the formula; what changes were made; and when it came into force. [5072]

Mr. Horam: A major review of the national weighted capitation formula took place in 1994. As a result, new adjustments for need and cost were introduced in 1995–96 for allocations to regional health authorities. The revised formula was used to inform allocations to health authorities in 1996–97.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 14 November, *Official Report*, column *337*, what information is collected centrally on commitments entered into by NHS trusts arising from private finance initiative projects; and to what extent this information includes data on long-term revenue commitments arising from such projects. [5090]

Mr. Horam: Information including trust name, scheme description, capital value of scheme and status of the project is collected centrally on private finance initiative projects with a capital value of £1 million or over that have been approved since November 1992. Estimates on long-term revenue commitments arising from the private finance initiative for each individual trust are not collected centrally.

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of *(a)* the combined national insurance contribution income from employers and employees and *(b)* expenditure on the basic retirement pension and on all benefits, at present contribution rates and levels of benefit, for the years (i) 2000–01, (ii) 2010–11, (iii) 2020–21, (iv) 2030–31 and (v) 1995–96, if the Government Actuary's assumptions for later years are applied to that year and separately identifying for each set of figures (1) health service charges, (2) occupational pension rebates, (3) personal pension rebates and (4) personal pension subsidies. [5306]

Mr. Heald: The information requested is in the table:

£ billion

Great Britain	*2000–01*	*2010–11*	*2020–21*	*2030–31*	*1995–96*
National Insurance Fund					
Class 1 employee and employer					
Gross	51.85	61.70	69.70	75.35	43.95
C/O rebate	5.95	5.85	5.55	5.60	5.25
Net	45.90	55.85	64.15	69.75	38.70
Class 1A for cars and car fuel	0.45	0.55	0.60	0.70	0.45
Total	46.35	56.40	64.75	70.45	39.15
National Health Service					
Class 1	5.60	6.55	7.35	7.85	4.70
Class 1A	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
Total	5.65	6.60	7.40	7.90	4.75
Total all contributions					
Class 1					
Gross	57.45	68.25	77.05	83.20	48.65
C/O rebate	5.95	5.85	5.55	5.60	5.25
Net	51.50	62.40	71.50	77.60	43.40
Class 1A	0.50	0.60	0.65	0.75	0.50
Total	52.00	63.00	72.15	78.35	43.90

£ billion

Great Britain	2000–01	2010–11	2020–21	2030–31	1995–96
Rebates for personal pensions					
Total paid in year	2.10	2.65	2.50	2.15	[1]1.90
Benefit expenditure					
Retirement pension (flat-rate)	29.80	33.60	35.20	41.90	27.30
Retirement pension (additional)	4.20	8.40	10.90	12.00	2.20
Other benefits	8.20	8.80	10.30	9.90	10.20
Total	42.20	50.80	56.40	63.80	39.70

Notes:
[1] Includes the 1 per cent. additional rebate.
[2] Calculations are based on assumptions adopted for the report by the Government Actuary on the third quinquennial review under section 137 of the Social Security Act 1975 (HC 160), except for 1995–96 where actual figures are shown because it would not be appropriate to use demographic assumptions relating to later years. All figures are discounted to put them in 1994–95 price terms.
Source:
Government Actuary's Department.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received from the Benefits Agency and trade unions about staffing levels and resources in the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance. [4515]

Mr. Roger Evans: None.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what analysis he has undertaken of the impact of the jobseeker's allowance on young widows on benefit; and if he will make a statement. [4575]

Mr. Evans: We have in place a long-term programme of monitoring and evaluation of jobseeker's allowance.

Widows who wish to claim jobseeker's allowance are required to be available for employment. However, a widow whose youngest child is below the age of 16 may claim income support without being available for employment.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will review the case of Mr. Ron Fisher of Gulston road, Coventry, and the jobseeker's allowance. [4563]

Mr. Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 19 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will review the case of Ron Fisher of Gulstan Road, Coventry, and the jobseeker's allowance.

In the interests of confidentiality I have written to you separately about Mr. Fisher's claim to Job Seekers Allowance. I have outlined the background to Mr. Fisher's claim and the action taken by both the Benefits Agency Office and Employment Service Jobcentre.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about liaison between jobcentres and his Department over the jobseeker's allowance. [4564]

Mr. Evans: The administration of the payment of the jobseeker's allowance is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 19 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will make a statement about liaison between job centres and his Department over the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA).

JSA was introduced on the 7 October and is delivered jointly by the Benefits Agency (BA) and Employment Service (ES).

JSA and other relevant services for Jobseekers are being provided from Jobcentres, the majority of which now have BA staff working in them. Day to day liaison between BA and ES is the responsibility of local managers and staff and is working effectively. These local arrangements are supported by formal joint management structures at District, Area and National level and a Memorandum of Understanding between the two Agency Chief Executives.

Between formal meetings, managers and staff from the two agencies work together on a daily basis to ensure the smooth delivery of JSA.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Building Societies

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his oral answer of 12 November *Official Report*, column 144, if he will list the representatives of the building societies the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People met on 13 November, indicating the building societies to which they belong. [4762]

Mr. Burt: I met the director general and other members of staff of the Building Societies Association. The association represents buildings societies in general.

Single Parents

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 7 November, what factors underlay the scale of increases in the total sums spent on benefit for single parents. [4761]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Expenditure on lone parent benefits rose from £1.8 billion in 1978–79 to £9.5 billion in 1995–96—1995–96 prices. The most significant factor underlying the scale of this increase is the growth of lone parenthood in the general population, and in particular the growth of single, never married lone parents, who are less likely to be in work or receiving maintenance, and therefore more likely to be dependent on income support.

National Disability Council

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the oral answer by the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People to the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) of 12 November *Official Report*, column 143–44, if he will list the issues on which the National Disability Council has offered advice to Ministers on its own initiative; if he will list the dates on which such advice was offered; and if he will indicate in which cases Ministers *(a)* accepted and *(b)* rejected such advice. [4763]

Mr. Burt: The Government have regular contact with the National Disability Council. The council has given advice on a wide range of issues relevant to the reduction and elimination of discrimination against disabled people. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 requires the National Disability Council to provide the Secretary of State with an annual report which he must lay before Parliament and arrange for further publication as he considers appropriate. The annual report for 1995–96 was published on 9 July 1996. Copies were placed in the Library. It records, among other things, advice the council has given during the previous financial year. The council is required to produce a similar report as soon as is practicable after the current financial year.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what proportion of applications for disability living allowance or for an upgrade to higher rate disability living allowance an adverse decision is given without the adjudication officer seeking information from the claimant's general practitioner or hospital consultant. [4846]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested; the available information is given below.

A claimant is invited to provide supporting statements with his claim, for example from a GP, carer or social worker. Information from such sources may also be requested by an adjudication officer who may further ask for an examining medical practitioner's report. Information is sought from the most suitable source, and this may not be a GP or hospital consultant if, for example, the claimant has not recently attended for treatment.

Disability living allowance decisions made April 1992 to October 1996 [1] [2]

(1)	*(2) Decisions involving any additional evidence other than from a GP or hospital (Thousands)*	*(3) Adverse decisions (of col 2) (Thousands)*	*(4) Adverse decisions as a percentage of decisions (col 3 as a percentage of col 2)*
Initial claims	1,568	[3]705	45
Other decisions[4]	1,414	[5]955	68

Source:
Analytical Services Division: 100 per cent. data.
Notes:
[1] All figures are rounded and are for decisions based on evidence provided in the claim pack,which may include a GP's statement.
[2] Cases where the type of evidence used is unknown have been excluded.
[3] An adverse decision is one where benefit is refused.
[4] Decisions made for renewal claims, reviews and appeals.
[5] An adverse decision is one where either a previous refusal has been upheld, or where the benefit was previously awarded and the decision is not to increase the level of the award.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information is collated centrally on *(a)* the long-term revenue commitments and *(b)* any other commitments arising as a result of private finance initiative projects agreed by (i) his Department and (ii) agencies accountable to his Department. [5077]

Mr. Burt: The Government response to the Treasury Committee report on the private finance initiative agreed the importance of collecting and monitoring information on future spending commitments arising from PFI contracts. Such information is now being collated. The response stated that aggregate projections of the level of expenditure that is expected to arise from signed PFI contracts would be published in the 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report."

Child Support Agency

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what assessment he has made of the steps taken by the Child Support Agency to secure liability orders within a reasonable time on parents who consistently avoid providing maintenance for their children; [4123]

(2) how many complaints the Child Support Agency has received in the last year about fathers who successfully avoid making any payment due to the mothers of their children, whose cases have been registered by the Child Support Agency. [4125]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Sir Dudley Smith, dated 19 November 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security about liability orders and complaints to the Agency about fathers who avoid paying their maintenance.

The Agency makes every effort to ensure that absent parents meet their maintenance liability, and takes various forms of enforcement action where this does not happen.

You have specifically asked about liability orders which are applied for through the courts, mainly against non-compliant self employed absent parents. In the period from 1 April 1996 to 30 September 1996 the number of liability orders the Agency applied for was 1,082; this is an increase of 55% on the same period last year.

Each such case is considered on its merits. Legal action against an absent parent is a serious step and is not taken lightly. Nevertheless, if all other voluntary methods fails and if a deduction from earnings order is not a possibility, then a liability order is applied for. Additionally, since May of this year the Agency has been able to enter liability orders as debts in the County Court Register of Judgments, which may in turn affect credit availability for the absent parent concerned.

I am afraid I cannot give you an answer to your question about the number of complaints against fathers who do not comply with child support liability. There is no business need for us to categories

complaints along the lines that you describe. For example, whether they are about one or other party to child maintenance or by gender within that category.

I hope this is helpful.

Court Orders (Avoidance)

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidelines he issues to police forces in respect of obtaining evidence about anyone who consistently avoids their responsibilities under court and official orders by constantly changing their address. [4128]

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

None. This is an operational matter for individual chief officers of police.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Students

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research he has *(a)* conducted and *(b)* evaluated about the costs faced by Northern Ireland students who study in Great Britain because of a lack of higher education places in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [3582]

Mr. Ancram: None.

Unemployment

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people in Northern Ireland have experienced at least one period of unemployment since 1979. [3936]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is available only from October 1993. In the three-year period to October 1996, 196,787 people have made at least one new claim for unemployment-related benefit.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the unemployment figures on the basis of the current statistical definition in each of the last 10 years in Northern Ireland. [3944]

Mr. Ancram: The unemployment figures on the basis of the current statistical definition in each of the last 10 years in Northern Ireland were as follows:

Year	*Annual average figure*	*Percentage of the work force*
1987	120,400	16.4
1988	111,100	15.0
1989	103,300	14.0
1990	95,300	12.8
1991	99,100	12.9
1992	104,700	13.8
1993	103,700	13.7
1994	97,100	12.6
1995	88,100	11.4
1996[1]	85,800	11.1

[1] January to October.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of the population of working age in Northern Ireland were unemployed in each year since 1979. [3945]

Mr. Ancram: The information, which is available on a consistent only basis from 1984, is as follows:

	Percentage working age population unemployed (ILO definition)
Spring	
1984	12.1
1985	11.7
1986	11.6
1987	11.0
1988	10.2
1989	9.3
1990	8.7
1991	9.0
1992	9.1
1993	9.1
1994	8.3
1995	8.0
1996	7.1

Source:
Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey, spring 1984 to spring 1996.

Carrowdore Village

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what residential developments have been approved for Carrowdore village; how many homes are planned for each development; what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the footways to support these developments; what proposals there are to provide increased accommodation at Carrowdore primary school; and if he will make a statement about the future growth of Carrowdore village. [3909]

Mr. Ancram: The South–Eastern education and library board has no plans to provide additional accommodation at Carrowdore primary school.

Responsibility for the planning matters raised have been delegated to the Planning Service under its chief executive, Mr. T. W. Stewart. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given to these points.

Letter from T. W. Stewart to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 18 November 1996:

Mr. Moss has asked me to reply to your recent question about the future development of Carrowdore Village.

In the last 9 years, a total of 7 residential developments, comprising 121 new houses, have been approved within the development limited of Carrowdore village as follows:

Location	*Units*	*Date approved*
Church Walk	10	23 June 1987
Main Street	22	18 January 1988
Manse Road	22	4 April 1990
New Road	13	9 April 1991
Castle Place	5	22 April 1992
Church Road	7	14 September 1995
Main Street	42	13 February 1996

A monitoring survey carried out in July of this year indicated that to date, 47 of these houses have been built. The adequacy of the footways to support these developments was taken into account in determining the planning applications for these proposals.

The North Down and Ards Area Plan 1984–1995, which remains the statutory development plan for the area, identifies a development limit for Carrowdore village. Within that development limit, there is scope for further housing other than for that for which planning approval has already been granted. The future growth of the village will be considered when the Area Plan is reviewed.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) when Main street in Carrowdore village was last resurfaced; when it is proposed next to resurface the street; and if he will make a statement; [3911]

(2) what proposals he has to provide a footway from the Manse Court junction with Ballyblack road east to the existing footway at Main street, Carrowdore; and if he will make a statement. [3910]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Roads Service under its chief executive, Mr. G. P. Fraser. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from G. P. Fraser to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 15 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked the Chief Executive to reply to your questions about the resurfacing of Main Street, Carrowdore and the provision of a footway from the Manse Court junction with Ballyblack Road to the existing footway at Main Street, Carrowdore. In his absence I am replying on his behalf.

We have no records to indicate the last time Main Street, Carrowdore was resurfaced and can only confirm that it was prior to 1973. Roads Service intends to surface dress the carriageway next summer following the completion of Water Service work in the area.

We have no proposals to construct a footway at the location in question.

Job Creation

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many jobs have been created in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years. [3938]

Mr. Ancram: The creation of jobs over the past 10 years is demonstrated by the rise in the number in employment. The position for each of the last 10 years is set out in the table:

Northern Ireland civil employment at June of each year

Year	Employers in employment	Self employed	Civil employed	Change in civil employed over year
1986	501,400	75,700	577,100	—
1987	504,100	83,200	587,300	+10,200
1988	517,200	87,000	604,200	+16,900
1989	525,600	85,100	611,700	+7,600
1990	533,200	90,300	628,500	+16,700
1991	542,100	92,200	634,300	+5,800
1992	543,600	83,300	626,900	–7,400
1993	545,400	80,700	627,100	+200
1994	557,800	82,200	640,000	+12,900
1995	573,000	82,800	655,800	+15,800
1996	573,100	82,800	655,900	+100

Figures rounded to the nearest 100 and may not sum due to rounding. Self-employed estimates for 1996 are currently not available. In accordance with practice the estimate is held constant at the level of the previous year.

Low Pay

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people in Northern Ireland currently earn less than £2.50 per hour. [3937]

Mr. Ancram: Information on hourly earnings in Northern Ireland is available from the "New Earnings Survey" and relates to the proportion of employees within the earnings band specified. The latest figures available are for April 1995 when 0.9 per cent. of full-time male employees and 1.3 per cent. of full-time female employees earned less than £2.50 per hour.
Source: New Earnings Survey, April 1995.

Benefits Expenditure

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the expenditure on benefits paid in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years. [3943]

Mr. Moss: The information requested is given in the table.

Year	Benefit spend (£ million)
1985–86	1,230.7
1986–87	1,335.5
1987–88	1,403.6
1988–89	1,465.6
1989–90	1,557.1
1990–91	1,707.7
1991–92	1,951.1
1992–93	2,211.5
1993–94	2,469.7
1994–95	2,648.2
1995–96[1]	2,833.1

[1] Estimated figures.

Alcohol

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* people and *(b)* children under the age of 18 years have been diagnosed as alcoholics in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [4410]

Mr. Moss: The information available is given in the table. The Department of Health and Social Services intends next year to commission a review of its strategy on alcohol misuse.

The number of in-patients discharged at least once from Northern Ireland mental illness hospitals and psychiatric units with a primary diagnosis of alcohol dependence syndrome is shown in the table:

In-patients diagnosed	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
All ages	856	922	921
Aged under 18	2	5	1

Figures are based on code 303 of the 9th revision of the International Classification of Diseases, alcohol dependence syndrome.

Anti-social Tenants

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy to review

the Northern Ireland Housing Executive allocation policy to ensure that anti-social tenants can be transferred to new accommodation under a negative points system. [4458]

Mr. Moss: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and the chief executive has advised me that the transfer of any tenant, including those deemed guilty of anti-social behaviour, is governed by the executive's transfer policy and not its allocation policy. The executive has no powers compulsorily to transfer a secure tenant. A transfer takes place on the basis of a request from, and agreement with, an individual tenant. There are no plans to change this policy.

In cases where tenants are deemed guilty of anti-social behaviour, the executive, under the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1983, has powers through the courts, to seek repossession of its property. However, before taking such action, the executive will invoke its neighbourhood complaints procedure in an attempt to settle any disputes. For the future, it is envisaged that a draft Northern Ireland Housing Order 1997 will contain provisions strengthening the grounds for repossession where a tenant is guilty of anti-social behaviour, and provide for injunctions, backed by a power of arrest, to be granted in such cases. These provisions are similar to those contained in the Housing Act 1996.

District Council Client Officers

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the district councils in Northern ireland have their chief officers designated as *(a)* town clerk, *(b)* chief executive, *(c)* town clerk and chief executive and *(d)* other designation. [4396]

Mr. Moss: None of the 26 district councils uses the designation town clerk. Seven councils refer to their chief officer as chief executive, 12 refer to the post-holder as town clerk and chief executive and seven refer to the post-holder as clerk and chief executive.

Private Clegg

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to refer the case of Private Clegg back to the Court of Appeal. [4288]

Sir John Wheeler: My right hon. and learned Friend received from Lee William Clegg's solicitors an application that his case be referred to the Court of Appeal for Northern Ireland again under section 14 of the Criminal Appeal (Northern Ireland) Act 1980.

My right hon. and learned Friend has sought an independent scientific report on the material submitted in support of the application to assist him in deciding whether he would be justified in referring the case to the Court of Appeal.

Terrorism (Compensation)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many and what occasions and dates he has used his exceptional power to pay criminal injury or damage compensation to *(a)* terrorists, *(b)* members and *(c)* former members of illegal organisations. [4453]

Sir John Wheeler: In the four and a half years since my right hon. and learned Friend took up his duties in Northern Ireland, the discretionary power to make payments in lieu of compensation where applicants have been disallowed because of convictions for terrorism and/or for membership of unlawful association has been exercised on four occasions and on the basis of the special circumstances of each individual case. All these applicants had previous convictions for terrorism and none for membership of unlawful associations. In 1993–94 there was one payment, in 1994–95 there were two payments and in 1995–96 there was one payment. No payments have been, or are likely to be, made to any applicant who has a continuing membership of an unlawful association.

Arable Area Scheme

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many payments were made in Northern Ireland in 1995–96 for set-aside under the arable area scheme *(a)* between £0 and £5,000, *(b)* £5,001 and £10,000, *(c)* £10,001 and £15,000, *(d)* £15,001 and £20,000, *(e)* £20,001 and £25,000 and *(f)* over £25,001. [4225]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* The information is as follows:

Value £	*Set-aside payment 1995–96*
0–5,000	201
5,001–10,000	11
10,001–15,000	1
15,001–20,000	—
20,001–25,000	—
Over 25,000	—

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many payments were made in Northern Ireland in 1995–96 under the arable area payments scheme *(a)* between £0 and £5,000, *(b)* 5,001 and £10,000, *(c)* 10,001 and £15,000, *(d)* £15,001 and £20,000, *(e)* £20,001 and £25,000, *(f)* £25,001 and £50,000, *(g)* £50,001 and £75,000, *(h)* £75,001 and £100,000, *(i)* £100,001 and £150,000, *(j)* £150,001 and £200,000 and *(k)* £200,001 and over. [4226]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* The information is as follows:

Arable Area Payments 1995–96

£	*Less favoured areas (LFA)*	*Non less favoured areas*
0–5000	878	2,198
5,001–10,000	12	66
10,001–15,000	2	54
15,001–20,000	2	28
20,001–25,000	—	19
25,001–50,000	—	27
50,001–75,000	—	—
75,001–100,000	—	—
100,001–150,000	—	—
150,001–200,000	—	—
200,001–and over	—	—
Total payments	894	2,392

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information is collated centrally on *(a)* the long-term revenue commitments and *(b)* any other commitments arising as a result of private finance initiative projects agreed by (i) his Department and (ii) agencies accountable to his Department. [5079]

Sir John Wheeler: The Government response to the Treasury Committee report on the private finance initiative agreed on the importance of collecting and monitoring information on future spending commitments arising from contracts under the private finance initiative. Such information is now being collected. The response stated that aggregate projections of the level of expenditure which is expected to arise from signed contracts under the initiative would be published in the 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report."

DEFENCE

Helicopters

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what qualifications are required for service personnel to fly helicopters in each of the services. [4424]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 15 November 1996]:* The qualifications required by service personnel to fly helicopters are as follows:

Royal Navy

Education—minimum five GCSEs (English and Mathematics) and two A-levels (or equivalent)

Flying aptitude tests and medical

Initial officer training

Army

Minimum rank Lance-corporal (recommended for Corporal)

Pre-selection course, including aptitude tests, written tests and medical

Royal Air Force

Education—minimum five GCSEs (English and Mathematics) and two A-levels (or equivalent)

Flying aptitude tests and medical

Initial officer training

Elementary flying training

Basic, advanced and operational helicopter flying training are currently carried out separately by the single services. However, from 1 April 1997 all basic and advanced helicopter training will be provided for the three services by the defence helicopter flying school, a tri-service establishment at Shawbury.

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column *521*, what arrangements have been made for industrial participation in respect of the purchase of helicopters. [3664]

Mr. Arbuthnot: As part of the Apache industrial participation arrangements, GKN Westland committed that 50 per cent. of the baseline contract work would be placed in the UK. GKN Westland has now identified how this will be achieved. It has already placed contracts for 35 per cent. and its offshore subcontractors have placed contracts for a further 5 per cent., making a total of 40 per cent. In accordance with MOD policy, the contract awards from the offshore subcontractors are now being audited to verify their claims. GKN Westland is thus well on course to meet its commitment in full.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the paper in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, reporting the mortality studies of Gulf war veterans conducted by Dr. Han Kang. [4573]

Mr. Soames: My Department has noted with interest the paper "Mortality among US Veterans of the Persian Gulf War" by Dr. Han Kang and Tim Bullman.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the interim report of the US presidential advisory committee on Gulf war veterans' illnesses. [4571]

Mr. Soames: My Department has noted the interim report of the US presidential advisory committee, and will examine its final report, when published, with great interest.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the director of the Persian Gulf Veterans Co-ordinating Board in the US concerning research on the illnesses of Gulf war veterans. [4574]

Mr. Soames: I visited the US earlier this month, where I held discussions with the senior members of the US Administration and their staff, including the director of the Persian Gulf Veterans Co-ordinating Board, about research into the illnesses of Gulf war veterans. My Department's officials, both here and in Washington, maintain a very close liaison with their US colleagues, including the director of the Persian Gulf Veterans Co-ordinating Board, on research and other issues relating to the health of Gulf war veterans.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the research carried out by the division of epidemiology and scientific graphics laboratory at the South Western medical school in Dallas relating to the causes of illnesses developed by Gulf war veterans. [4572]

Mr. Soames: We are aware of research into Gulf health issues being conducted at the University of Texas South Western medical school in Dallas, including the work of Dr. Robert Haley. We will look with interest at the results of Dr. Haley's research when they are published.

Disbanded and Merged Regiments

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will fund a travelling exhibition to exhibit *(a)* regimental silver. *(b)* works of art, *(c)* colours and *(d)* trophies for all disbanded and merged Regular and Territorial Army regiments. [4819]

Mr. Soames: No. The objects concerned are non-public property, and are not the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence. The question of any funding for such a travelling exhibition would therefore be for the regiment(s) concerned to address.

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the location of *(a)* regimental silver, *(b)* works of art, *(c)* colours and *(d)* trophies for all disbanded and merged Regular and Territorial Army regiments. [4820]

Mr. Soames: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will meet representatives from Sheffield museums to discuss mounting an exhibition to exhibit *(a)* regimental silver, *(b)* works of art, *(c)* colours and *(d)* trophies of the disbanded and merged Regular and Territorial Army regiments. [4906]

Mr. Soames: No. The objects mentioned are non-public property, and are not the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence. Museums interested in mounting such an exhibition should therefore approach regiments direct.

Admiral Sir Peter Abbot

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Admiral Sir Peter Abbot required official clearance of the text of his speech to the Royal United Services Institution on 17 October; and to what extent his speech represents Government policy. [5147]

Mr. Soames: Ministerial clearance is not required for addresses given to private bodies such as the Royal United Services Institute, whose purpose is to encourage debate of relevant issues. The speech did not represent Government policy; rather, Admiral Abbot was developing a personal view, contributing to just such an academic debate. The issues raised in the speech are already in the public domain.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information is collated centrally on *(a)* the long-term revenue commitments and *(b)* any other commitments arising as a result of private finance initiative projects agreed by (i) his Department and (ii) agencies accountable to his Department. [5087]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Government response to the Treasury Committee report on the private finance initiative agreed on the importance of collecting and monitoring information on future spending commitments arising from contracts under the private finance initiative. Such information is now being collected. The response stated that aggregate projections of the level of expenditure that is expected to arise from signed contracts under the initiative would be published in the 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report."

Contracts

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts his Department has had with *(a)* Robert Wilson and Sons Ltd., *(b)* Hillsdown Ambient Foods Group Ltd. and *(c)* their subsidiary companies during the last five years; what was the value of each of these contracts; what goods were supplied; and to what extent these contracts will be affected by the closure of the Robert Wilsons and Sons Ltd. plant in Kilwinning. [5057]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The data held centrally for MOD headquarters contracts show that the following contracts have been awarded since 1993:

Robert Wilson and Sons (Est. 1849) Ltd. (part of Hillsdown Ambient Foods Group)

	Value £
1995	
Produced at Kilwinning	
Canned meats	333,000
Retort pouched meals	1,392,000
Pouched water	42,000
1996	
Produced at Kilwinning	
Canned meats	222,400
Retort pouched meals	4,639,000
Pouched water	59,600

HL Foods (part of Hillsdown Holdings)

	Value £
1994	
Produced at Kilwinning	
Canned meats	265,000
Retort pouched meals	1,365,000
Produced at North Walsham	
Baked beans	38,000
1995	
Produced at North Walsham	
Baked beans	49,000
1996	
Produced at North Walsham	
Baked beans	66,000

The following contracts were placed with the former company Haywood Foods Ltd. part of Hillsdown Holdings plc:

Hayward Foods Ltd. (part of Hillsdown Holdings)

1993	*Value £*
Produced at Kilwinning	
Canned meats	244,000
Canned puddings	31,000
Retort pouch meals	1,491,000
Produced at North Walsham	
Baked beans	34,000
1994	
Produced at Long Sutton	
Tinned carrots	19,000

The above companies are subsidiaries of the large Hillsdown Holdings plc group, which includes a large number of household name food, domestic goods, furniture and property companies, for example, and further research on those companies could be undertaken only at disproportionate cost.

Several of the contracts will be completed before the planned closure of the Kilwinning site early next year. Work that is not completed will be novated to another "sister" company within the Hillsdown Group and it is not expected that there will be any adverse effect on the MOD.

Gurkhas

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ensure that Gurkha soldiers serving in the British Army receive the same pay, pensions, family accommodation and other terms and conditions of service as soldiers in the British Army. [4777]

Mr. Soames: A full review of questions relating to Gurkha conditions of service is currently being undertaken by my Department, including questions relating to their pay, family accommodation and other related matters. The review, which has been prompted by the imminent withdrawal from Hong Kong, is examining the existing arrangements with a view to making them more appropriate to the move of the Gurkha home base from Hong Kong to the United Kingdom. All Gurka terms and conditions of service are underpinned by the 1947 tri-partite agreement signed by the Governments of India, Nepal and the United Kingdom, and will continue to be governed by these arrangements. In essence, the rates of pay and pension are based on those paid to the Indian army as stated in the agreement. British Gurkhas do, however, receive a substantial addition to their basic pay which takes into account the cost of living in their duty station.

Gurkha pensions, while not part of the same review, are, as a matter of routine, reviewed annually. One of the factors taken into account is the rate of inflation in Nepal; another is the rates of pension paid to Indian army Gurkhas as governed by the tri-partite agreement. British Gurkha pensions were increased by 15 per cent. in 1996.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Environmental Auditing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the ways in which his Department has *(a)* demonstrated by example and *(b)* promoted externally, the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing; and if he will make a statement. [4527]

Mr. Howard: The Home Office takes its responsibilities to the environment seriously, and has been represented at each of the green Ministers meetings.

The policies and programmes of my Department have been assessed as having low direct environmental sensitivity. Thus, the environmental audits undertaken by the Home Office have concentrated on estate management issues where scope for green housekeeping efficiencies has been sought. All local property centres are asked to conduct an annual green housekeeping audit. A programme of energy surveys has been run in response to the target set by the Department of the Environment to reduce energy consumption by 15 per cent. in the period from 1990 to 1995. Notable successes were at the police training centres at Bruche and Cwmbran and at the police scientific development branch premises in Langhurst and Sandridge, where implementing the recommendations of the reviews produced falls in energy consumption of between 16.8 per cent. and 22.9 per cent. over the five years. Where appropriate, the Department adopts the Building Research Establishment environmental assessment method as a means of enhancing the environmental performance of new offices and those undergoing major refurbishment.

Motorways (Objects thrown from Bridges)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by police authority area and by location the number of reported incidents involving objects thrown from motorway bridges at vehicles for each year since 1991 to date, including how many *(a)* injuries were caused, *(b)* fatalities were caused, *(c)* resulted in prosecution and *(d)* resulted in conviction in each year from 1991 to date. [4695]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not collected centrally.

British Citizenship

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria he uses in determining the suitability or otherwise of applicants for British citizenship. [4718]

Mr. Kirkhope: The criterion applied is whether the applicant meets the statutory requirements of the British Nationality Act 1981 relevant to his or her application.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what official publications inform applicants of the criteria that will be used when determining British citizenship applications. [4717]

Mr. Kirkhope: The requirements for British citizenship are set out in the British Nationality Act 1981 and in a number of information leaflets, copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many refusals of applications for British citizenship he has determined since 1992. [4738]

Mr. Kirkhope: Since 1 January 1992, 32,272 applications for British citizenship have been refused.

Zoos and Circuses

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which provisions of the winter quarters regulations apply to animals held by zoos; if he will apply them to animals held by circuses; and if he will make a statement. [4578]

Mr. Sackville: The Zoo Licensing Act 1981, but not the winter quarters regulations, applies to the keeping of animals in zoos. Circus animals will continue to be governed by the Performing Animals (Regulations) 1925 and the Protection of Animals Act 1911.

Alcohol (Minors)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions for selling *(a)* alcohol and *(b)* alcopops to under-age children have taken place in England and Wales in each of the last five years; what proportion of prosecutions have involved sales from (i) public houses, (ii) off licences, (iii) supermarkets and (iv) other outlets; and if he will make a statement. [4404]

Mr. Maclean: The information held centrally does not distinguish between the forms in which alcohol is sold or the types of retail outlet proceeded against.

The table shows the number of prosecutions for offences of selling intoxicating liquor to persons under 18.

Number of defendants prosecuted for the offence of selling intoxicating liquor to persons under 18[1] 1991 to 1995

England and Wales

	Prosecutions
1991	309
1992	195
1993	156
1994	137
1995	198

[1] Section 169(1) Licensing Act 1994.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about his policy on people purchasing alcohol on behalf of minors. [4414]

Mr. Maclean: I fully support the proposals of my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) to enable the police to confiscate alcohol from people under 18 drinking alcohol in a public place, and to seize alcohol from people who are 18 if it is intended for consumption by under-age drinkers in public.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* people and *(b)* children under the age of 18 have been prosecuted for alcohol-related crime in England and Wales in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [4406]

Mr. Maclean: It is possible to distinguish centrally only defendants prosecuted for offences under the intoxicating liquor laws as opposed to alcohol-related crimes.

Information is given in the table:

Number of defendants prosecuted for offences under the intoxicating liquor laws by age 1991 to 1995

England and Wales

Offence description/age	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Drunkenness, simple					
Under 18	69	37	19	35	39
All ages	4,503	3,663	2,795	3,349	3,061
Drunkenness, with aggravation					
Under 18	969	798	626	819	1,034
All ages	30,580	25,893	21,003	22,247	22,153
Offences by licensed persons etc.					
Under 18	4	2	2	1	—
All ages	1,008	863	686	516	629
Other offences against intoxicating liquor laws					
Under 18	103	30	14	24	17
All ages	1,106	843	558	446	383

Closed Circuit Television Schemes

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the cost per crime averted of the five most expensive closed circuit television schemes installed since 1992; and if he will list these. [4488]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not available.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the increase in *(a)* staff and *(b)* costs of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board in each of the past five years. [4094]

Mr. Maclean: The information is summarised in the table:

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Average number of staff in post	381	386	414	458	466
Total cost of administration (£ million)	13.1	14.2	17.3	17.8	19.3
Compensation paid (£ million)	143.7	152.2	165.1	175.4	179.0

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions, on application to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, victims have been paid before a criminal act has been established in the courts in each of the past five years; and what proportion these payments represent of the overall payments made by the board. [4095]

Mr. Maclean: The data requested are not available. The compensation arrangements for victims of crimes of violence, whether under the common law damages scheme or the tariff-based one which superseded it on 1 April 1996, do not require the act of violence to have been established in a court of law. Many assailants are unidentified or otherwise untraced. Where, however, a trial is pending, it may be necessary for the final assessment of a claim to be delayed until the outcome of the trial is known, since the proceedings may raise issues of eligibility.

Drug Traffickers

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what sums of money have been recovered from drug traffickers since 1 January; and what proportion of this amount is ear-marked for anti-drug abuse projects. [3898]

Mr. Maclean: No figures are yet available for 1996. The latest available figures show that, in the last financial year—1995–96—£5,343,241.63 was recovered from convicted drug traffickers. Under present accounting arrangements, all confiscated money is paid directly into the Consolidated Fund, from which Government expenditure generally, including substantial funding for drug-related work, is financed. In addition, sums realised from the enforcement of overseas confiscation orders, asset shares and gifts received as a result of co-operation with other countries are specifically ear-marked for

spending on anti-drug projects through the seized assets fund, and £168,000 has been made available in this way for spending in 1996–97.

Prison Service

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish an independent audit of the performance of the Prison Service against its key performance indicators for each six-month period of 1995–96 and 1996–97; and if he will make a statement about the accuracy of the information relating to the indicators. [2941]

Miss Widdecombe: The Prison Service's performance against its key performance indicators—KPIs—for 1996–97 and previous years were published in its corporate plan 1996 to 1999, and I understand that the Director General has written to you with details of performance in the first six months of 1996–97.

I am satisfied that the overall quality of the KPI data is good. As you know, the definition of the KPIs is agreed with Ministers, and the Prison Service has detailed instructions setting out how the data are to be collected. The Prison Service's own standards audit team is currently auditing data collection for KPIs in individual establishments. Preliminary results confirm that overall quality is good, while suggesting ways in which data definitions could be further tightened so as to improve quality further.

It is important that there is independent validation of the Prison Service's data, and the Home Office internal audit unit is about to commence an audit which will be external to the agency.

Crime Prevention

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to meet local authority representatives to discuss crime prevention; and if he will make a statement. [4826]

Mr. Maclean: None, but officials of the crime prevention agency are in regular contact with local authority representatives.

Police Dogs

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how much compensation each police force in England and Wales has paid to members of the public following complaints about the use of police dogs in each year since 1985; [3621]

(2) how many complaints the Police Complaints Authority has received about the use of police dogs in each police force in each year since 1985; [3535]

(3) how many complaints each police force in England and Wales has received concerning the use of police dogs in each year since 1985; [3534]

(4) how many times each police force in England and Wales has paid compensation to members of the public following complaints about the use of police dogs in each year since 1985. [3620]

Mr. Maclean: Information on the number of complaints against the police involving police dogs, or cases in which compensation is paid by police forces, is not recorded centrally.

Sentencing and Detention

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to halve the maximum sentence for burglary and for the maximum period of detention at a youth custody establishment; and if he will make a statement. [4672]

Mr. Maclean: We have no plans to reduce the maximum sentence for burglary or the maximum period of detention in a young offender institution.

Crime (Sentences) Bill

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the likely rise in the prison population as a result of changes to the parole system outlined in the Crime (Sentences) Bill; and if he will make a statement. [4675]

Mr. Maclean: The Crime (Sentences) Bill requires the courts to take account of the abolition of parole and the changes in early release arrangements when passing sentence, with a view to ensuring that, in general, prisoners should spend broadly the same length of time in prison as they do now.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure that a practice direction is issued on completion of the Crime (Sentences) Bill on the appropriateness of sentence lengths; and if he will make a statement. [4677]

Mr. Maclean: It is for the Lord Chief Justice to determine whether to issue a practice direction.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answers of 5 November, *Official Report*, column *434*, and 12 November, *Official Report*, column *119*, if he will set out the statistical difference between the number of offenders found guilty or cautioned and the number of offences ending in a conviction or caution. [4977]

Mr. Maclean: The number of offenders found guilty or cautioned is a count of the number of occasions on which a finding of guilt is made or a caution administered. On each occasion, an offender may be found guilty of, or cautioned for, more than one offence. For reasons of practicality and cost effectiveness, routine Home Office statistics are offender based and relate to the principal offence—generally the one attracting the highest penalty.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information is collated centrally on *(a)* the long-term revenue commitments and *(b)* any other commitments arising as a result of private finance initiative projects agreed by (i) his Department and (ii) agencies accountable to his Department. [5083]

Mr. Howard: The Government response to the Treasury Committee report on the private finance initiative agreed the importance of collecting and monitoring information on future spending commitments arising from contracts under the PFI. Such information is now being collected. The response stated that aggregate projections of the level of expenditure that is expected to arise from signed contracts under the initiative would be published in the 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report."

Any other commitments specific to particular projects, including those incurred by the supplier, are monitored by managers responsible for ensuring that satisfactory service is received. Contingent liabilities are reported to Parliament.

Tote

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will allow the Horserace Totalisator Board to take bets on lotteries run outside the United Kingdom. [5546]

Mr. Kirkhope: We will shortly lay an order allowing the Tote to take bets on the outcome of foreign lotteries.

The Government are also supporting the private Member's Bill introduced in another place to allow the Tote to take fixed odds bets on non-sporting events.

Convictions and Cautions

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the number of crimes ending in a court conviction in each police force area of England and Wales in the year to June; [3634]

(2) if he will list the number of crimes ending in a caution in each police force area of England and Wales in the year to June. [3635]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answers 18 November 1996]:* The information requested will not be available until autumn 1997.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department first became aware of the difficulties of calculating remissions for convicted prisoners originally held on remand. [3825]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 14 November 1996]:* On four occasions since 1982, the courts upheld the Prison Service's approach to the complex sentence calculations required by section 67 of the Criminal Justice Act 1967.

The Prison Service proposed in July 1995 that work be undertaken to develop a simpler system of sentence calculation. That work led to the new arrangements for determining the effect on release dates of time spent on remand contained in the Crime (Sentences) Bill. This provides that in all cases the judge will determine, when passing sentence, how much remand time will count against the sentence.

Crime (Clear-up Rate)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of crimes cleared up by the police in each police force area of England and Wales in the year to June. [3636]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* Statistics on clear-ups are published only on a calendar year basis. The latest available data relate to 1995 and were given in the reply to the hon. Member on 12 November, *Official Report* column *199*.

Knives

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to adopt a knife code along the lines of that adopted in Coventry; [4106]

(2) What discussions he has had with the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) on the introduction of a knife code. [4107]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answers 18 November 1996]:* My right hon. and learned Friend has given his full support to the voluntary knife code adopted by retailers in Coventry, and would support its introduction elsewhere. My right hon. and learned Friend has not discussed the code with the hon. Member for Blackburn.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the extent to which crimes involving knives has fallen in Coventry since the knife code was introduced in the City. [4108]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes involving the use of knives were committed *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the west midlands in each year since 1990; and what was the annual percentage change. [4105]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* For crimes recorded by the police, the information is not available centrally. The best estimate from the 1996 British crime survey is that, in 1995, there were about 160,000 incidents of wounding and robbery in which the offenders had—but did not necessarily use—a knife. Information for previous years covered by the survey—1992 and 1994—cannot reliably be compared.

Criminal Justice System

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library *(a)* the raw data used to produce the first chart presented on page 25 of "Digest 3: Information on the Criminal Justice System in England and Wales" and *(b)* similar statistics with percentages for (i) 1995 and (ii) 1981. [4770]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 19 November 1996]:* Information used to produce the first chart on page 25 of Digest 3 is presented in the table below. Information for 1995 and 1981 is not available in the form requested and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

	Total numbers[1]	Percentage of offences committed
Offences committed	11,566.7	100
Offences reported	5,457.6	47
Offences recorded	3,089.6	27
Offences cleared up	571.4	4.9
Offences resulting in a caution or conviction	310.3	2.7
Offences resulting in a conviction	225.9	2.0

[1] Covers criminal damage; theft of a motor vehicle; theft from a motor vehicle (including attempts); bicycle theft; domestic burglary; wounding; robbery; theft from a person.

State Opening of Parliament

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total cost of the police participation in the state opening of Parliament. [4691]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 19 November 1996]:* As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister stated in his reply to the hon. Member on 11 November *Official Report*, column *32*, any additional costs of police staff who took part in the ceremony are not separately costed.

Sexual Offences (Prosecution)

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have taken place under section 12 of the Sexual Offences Act 1956 since the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 came into operation. [4795]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 19 November 1996]:* Amendments to section 12 of the Sexual Offences Act 1956 under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 were implemented on 3 November 1994.

Information for prosecutions completed in 1995 is given in the table.

Number of defendants prosecuted for offences under Section 12 of the Sexual Offences Act 1956 as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994

England and Wales, 1995

Offence descriptions	Prosecutions
Buggery or attempted buggery	
By a male of a male under 16	48
By a male aged 21 or over with a male aged 16 or 17	1
By a male aged 18–20 with a male aged 16 or 17	–
By a male aged 16 or 17 with a male aged 16 or over	–
By a male not included above	7
By a male with a female under 16	25
By a male aged 21 or over with a female aged 16 or 17	2
By a male aged 18–20 with a female aged 16 or 17	–
By a male aged 16 or 17 with a female aged 16 or over	–
By a male with a female not included above	19
With an animal	3

West Yorkshire Police Force

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civilian staff were employed by the West Yorkshire police force in each year since 1979 to date. [4803]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 19 November 1996]:* The information is as follows:

As at March	Police strength	Civilian strength
1979[1]	4,739	1,191
1980	4,805	1,199
1981	5,084	1,270
1982	5,147	1,305
1983	5,145	1,238
1984	5,109	1,229
1985	4,991	1,253
1986	5,145	1,275
1987	5,142	1,360
1988	5,184	1,458
1989	5,278	1,613
1990	5,260	1,743
1991	5,268	1,875
1992	5,087	1,821
1993	5,037	1,867
1994	5,046	1,912
1995	5,050	1,965
1996	5,142	2,037

[1] As at May.

Criminal Cases Review Committee

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information was provided by the chairman of the Criminal Cases Review Committee to the selection committee responsible for his appointment in respect of his membership of the freemasons; and if this was regarded by the committee as a personal matter which might cause public embarrassment. [4912]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 19 November 1996]:* None. In making its recommendations to my right hon. and learned Friend, the selection committee was guided by the overriding principle of selection based on merit. Sir Frederick was an outstanding candidate.

Police Assistance

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received concerning insurance cover for special constables, lay visitors and other volunteers providing assistance to the police. [4649]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* Representations have been received from the Lake District Search and Mountain Rescue Association on behalf of the Mountain Rescue Council, and from a small number of right hon. and hon. Members.

Prisons

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give an estimate of the number of places for prisoners in HM prisons in each of the years 1996 to 2006. [52]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Chris Davies, dated 20 November 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of places for prisoners in each of the years 1996 to 2006.

Accommodation is defined as Planning CNA in use, which excludes places taken out of use for refurbishment and simple sanitation projects, and a small operating margin. It represents the total number of uncrowded places estimated to be available in the estate. It is not the operational capacity, which is the number of prisoners the estate can hold without serious risk to good order, security and the proper running of regimes and which allows for overcrowding. At the end of October 1996 Operational Capacity was 58,977 compared to a total prison population of 57,587.

The latest available accommodation estimate includes new prisons at Fazakerley, Bridgend, and the proposed new prison at Agecroft as well as the re-built Lowdham Grange, all of which will be constructed under the private finance initiative. Also included is the increase in capacity to meet the recent rise in the prison population.

Over the longer term, further permanent measures will be required to hold the projected prison population. The size of the building programme and funding requirements are under discussion in the current Public Expenditure Round.

The forecast also excludes additional places to be built as set out in the White Paper to hold the increase in the prison population resulting from the Crime (Sentences) Bill.

The forecast is shown below.

Years	*Accommodation*
1995–96	48,350
1996–97	51,450
1997–98	54,800
1998–99	57,100
1999–00	58,550
2000–01 to 2005–06	58,550 in each year

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 21 November 1996

PRIME MINISTER

European Year Against Racism

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what plans Her Majesty's Government have to mark European Year Against Racism in 1997. [5438]

The Prime Minister: The Government believe that the European Year Against Racism will make a valuable contribution to the work already being carried out to combat racism and we intend to take a full and active part in the initiative to ensure its success.

We are setting up a national co-ordinating committee which will oversee this work in the United Kingdom. The committee will be chaired by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Department, and I understand that the first meeting is due to take place on 2 December.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 21 November. [3995]

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 21 November. [3996]

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Government Information (Access)

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions part 7, paragraphs *(a)* and *(b)* of the code of practice on access to Government information has been used to deny information to hon. Members in each of the last three years, broken down by Government Departments and their agencies. [5445]

The Prime Minister: The information in the detail requested is not held centrally. Monitoring reports, showing progress in implementing the code of practice on access to Government information, are produced each year by the Office of Public Service. These include a breakdown of the exemptions cited when a refusal to provide information under the code results in a review of the case, but not a breakdown of the exemptions cited when the refusal is initially made. Copies of the monitoring reports published in March 1995 and March 1996 are available in the Libraries of the House.

EU General Affairs Council

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he or his Ministers have had with European Union Commissioners or officials on matters to be considered at the General Affairs Council on 25 November. [5473]

The Prime Minister: We have regular discussions with our European colleagues on all matters to be considered at the forthcoming General Affairs Council.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Prime Minister who will be representing the Government at the General Affairs Council on 25 November. [5475]

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend, the Foreign Secretary and the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Boothferry, (Mr. Davis) will represent Her Majesty's Government at the General Affairs Council on 25 November.

ENVIRONMENT

Castle Cement

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to monitor air quality around the Castle Cement plant in Clitheroe. [4715]

Mr. Clappison: The Department of the Environment has established a fixed monitoring station in the village of Chatburn in the vicinity of the Ribblesdale plant. The station is carrying out monitoring:

for PM_{10} (fine particles) using both the tapered element oscillating microbalance ("TEOM") automatic method and non-continuous sampling;

for NO, using the continuous ozone chemiluminescence system;

for NO_2 non-continuously using diffusion tubes;

for SO_2 using the continuous UV flourescence method.

All pollutant measurements will be quality assured to national standards.

European Union

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what has been the cost in the last 12 months of sending Ministers and officials to meetings in Brussels and elsewhere in Europe in connection with his Department's handling of EU business; [4944]

(2) what percentage of his Department's time and resources are spent dealing with administrative and policy matters connected with British membership of the European Union. [4954]

Sir Paul Beresford: This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Construction Industry (Timber)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to promote the use in the construction industry of timber produced from sustainable industries in rural areas. [4902]

Mr. Clappison: The Department of the Environment is supporting a number of innovation projects to encourage the use of sustainable timber from United Kingdom forests. These should assist the development of

rural industries. One such project will result in the construction of a demonstration building at Hook forest in Dorset.

Local Government Finance

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the reduction in public expenditure from the measures taken over the last 15 years to restrict expenditure by local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [4907]

Sir Paul Beresford: Since 1990–91, when capping in its current form was introduced, it has been directly responsible for reducing the budgets of those authorities that challenged their caps by a total that has now reached over a third of a billion pounds a year compared with the budgets originally set. The great majority of authorities did not challenge their caps, but set budgets within the limits implied by the capping criteria; although no direct estimate can be made, it is clear that in these cases, too, capping has been generally successful in ensuring that many authorities have budgeted at a lower level than would otherwise have been the case.

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to prevent local authorities setting budgets prior to the announcement of standard spending assessments; and if he will make a statement. [4825]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have no powers to stop an authority setting its budget before the statement on the local authority finance settlement. However, it is highly unlikely that an authority would wish to set a budget before this date and I am not aware of any authority having done so in recent years.

Homelessness (Sheffield)

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has taken to reduce homelessness in Sheffield; and if he will make a statement. [4904]

Mr. Clappison: In 1996–97, £7.8 million of grants are being paid under section 73 of the Housing Act 1985 to voluntary sector organisations which prevent or relieve homelessness. Of this, nearly £2 million funds the national Homelessness Advice Service, based on Citizens Advice Bureaux, which advises people who are homeless or potentially so. The service is available from four bureaux in Sheffield and at the specialist Sheffield debt support unit.

The remaining grant supports around 180 projects throughout England which offer direct practical help to single homeless people by finding accommodation and providing follow-up support. The Nomad advice centre in Sheffield, which helped over 170 people to find accommodation last year, will receive £25,780 this year.

Construction Industry (Insolvency Protection)

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to begin the independent review of insolvency protection for the construction industry; what the format of the review will be; and if he will make a statement. [4789]

Mr. Clappison: I intend to put proposals for the further consideration of these issues to the Construction Industry Council shortly.

Asbestos-related Diseases

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), of 1 November, *Official Report,* column *269,* what assessment he has made of the reason for the named areas having high rates of asbestos-related mesothelioma; and for what reasons a breakdown by district is not available from 1991. [5066]

Sir Paul Beresford: The high rates of mesothelioma in the districts mentioned in my reply of 1 November are related to the heavy industrial use of asbestos in the past in these areas, including shipbuilding, ship repairing and the manufacture of asbestos products.

The analysis was completed by the Health and Safety Executive only up until 1991 because at the time those were the most recent data available. The analysis will be updated next year to include the data from 1992 to 1995.

Doncaster Urban Development Plan

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the inspectors' report into the Doncaster urban development plan to be published; and if copies will be made available to hon. Members. [5139]

Sir Paul Beresford: The inspector's report on objections to the Doncaster unitary development plan is expected to be delivered to the Doncaster metropolitan borough council at the end of February 1997. It will be for the council to decide when to publish the report. Copies of the report would then be available on request from the council.

Ferris Wheel (South Bank)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to call in the millennium wheel planning application. [5545]

Mr. Gummer: I have no plans to call in the application for the millennium wheel. The wheel is an inspired idea and an imaginative way to mark the millennium, providing unparalleled, once-in-a-lifetime views of the heart of the capital. It has caught people's imaginations and created a sense of excitement about the millennium, not least among children.

It will be a boost to the economy of the south bank and will bring visitors and new life to this important stretch of the River Thames.

Lambeth has consulted widely. I have no reason to believe it has not considered the application thoroughly and taken into account the range of opinion held on the wheel. I am satisfied that it will not be a permanent feature; to ensure that, I have today issued directions to the council to inform me of any future applications affecting the site of the wheel.

Resource Accounting

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress his Department is making with

the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting; and in respect of which financial year he expects to publish the first set of resource accounts. [4983]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department of the Environment will be introducing its resource accounting system during 1997–98. The Department, in common with others, is preparing to implement resource budgeting in time to form the basis of the 2000 survey. As set out in Cm 2929, the first published resource accounts for the Department will be in respect of 1999–2000.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what level of training is currently required of employees providing services under the home energy efficiency scheme; and how he proposes to ensure an appropriate level of skills training in relation to any new measures incorporated into the scheme. [5373]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: This well regarded scheme has achieved high standards of workmanship and customer care through the efforts of the scheme's managers, Eaga Ltd., and the network of installers providing local delivery of the service. I expect these standards to be maintained or improved on in the future, whether or not any new measures are made available. The specification of any appropriate training requirements for employees working within the scheme is a matter for Eaga Ltd. At present, it requires anyone who gives householders energy advice under the scheme to obtain a specified qualification.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department has completed its review of the home energy efficiency scheme; and if he will make a statement. [5371]

Mr. Jones: I hope to make a statement about the future structure of the scheme shortly.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has made of the additional financial resources needed to fund any new measures introduced as a result of the review of the home energy efficiency scheme; and if he will make a statement. [5372]

Mr. Jones: Any changes which may be made in future to the home energy efficiency scheme will be structural, intended to make it even more effective and give better value for money. They would not be linked to any particular level of annual financial allocation. We remain fully committed to helping the most vulnerable people to keep warm and use energy more efficiently, and this successful scheme, on which we have spent nearly £350 million since it started some six years ago, has now made over 2 million households more comfortable.

Tesco Store, Tonbridge

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date the public inquiry into the proposal by Tesco for a retail store at Cannon lane, Tonbridge, is due to commence: and to whom and at what address representations about this proposal, including requests to give oral evidence at the inquiry, should be sent. [5444]

Sir Paul Beresford: The local public inquiry into the proposal by Tesco for a retail store at Cannon lane, Tonbridge is due to commence at 10.00 am on Tuesday 25 February 1997 at the council offices, the air station, West Malling. Representations and requests to give oral evidence at the inquiry should be addressed to Mrs. Christine Kavanagh at the Government Office for the South East, Bridge house, 1 Walnut Tree close, Guildford, Surrey GU1 4GA.

British Waterways Board

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to change the status of the British Waterways Board as a nationalised industry. [5255]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I have no plans to change the status of the British Waterways Board as a nationalised industry, but as part of the normal process of reviewing policy options I am continuing to consider jointly with the British Waterways Board whether there are options which would allow the board greater flexibility in generating additional income for the development of its canal network.

Development Land (Bedfordshire)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 14 November, *Official Report*, column *323*, on proposals for development near Henlow, Bedfordshire, if he will list the representations he has received from individuals and organisations in respect of the development; what acreage of vacant industrial and commercial development land there is in Bedfordshire; and when he hopes to make a decision on a public inquiry about this matter. [5298]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We received a number of representations about the proposal, and those people and organisations will now have the opportunity to express their views at a public inquiry, the date of which has yet to be arranged. The availability of alternative locations for the proposed development will be an issue for the inquiry.

Housing Ombudsman

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in establishing an independent housing ombudsman service for dealing with complaints against social landlords in England; and if he will make a statement. [5865]

Mr. Curry: The Housing Act 1996 provides for the first time that the Secretary of State may approve a scheme for the establishment of an independent housing ombudsman service for dealing with complaints against social landlords—the definition in the Act does not include local authorities. Earlier in the year we invited the current non-statutory housing association tenants' ombudsman to consult widely on a draft scheme for England which could be in place in time for 1 April 1997.

Following consultation, the ombudsman has submitted a scheme which I have approved. In considering the scheme, I have been concerned to ensure continuity with the existing non-statutory service. But I have also been keen to ensure that the new service is soundly based and able to achieve value for money for members, that its administration is straightforward and accountable, that its

procedure for dealing with complaints is accessible and fair, and that it has suitable and effective arrangements for safeguarding the independence of the ombudsman. The scheme will be administered by a company limited by guarantee, with equal representation on the board for member landlords, tenants and the public interest.

All social landlords must subscribe to the independent housing ombudsman service. This scheme should meet their needs and those of others involved. It should also prove attractive to other landlords who may wish to join.

I have placed a copy of the approved scheme in the Library.

Housing Associations

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his proposals for paying tax relief grant to non-charitable housing associations in 1997–98 and future years. [5866]

Mr. Curry: We published a consultation paper on 31 July setting out our proposals for the progressive reduction in tax relief grant payments to non-charitable housing associations. Eighty-eight responses were received.

Many associations said they needed more time to plan how to respond to the progressive reduction of tax relief grant and to effect any necessary changes. I accept this concern and recognise that associations need adequate time to accomplish a smooth change. I therefore propose that we continue to pay tax relief grant claims at the current norm of 100 per cent. during 1997–98 in respect of associations' tax liabilities up to and including 1996–97.

Another theme of the responses was that associations would appreciate a degree of certainty about future rates of payment. While I should not wish unreasonably to restrict future discretion in this matter, it seems to me helpful to give a clear steer to associations as to our future plans so that they can make appropriate arrangements. I therefore plan that in future years payments will be on a sliding scale. In 1998–99, in respect of tax liabilities during 1997–98, we plan to pay 75 per cent. of the first £50,000 of eligible claims, then 50 per cent. of the rest. In 1999–2000, in respect of tax liabilities during 1998–99, we plan to pay 50 per cent. of the first £25,000 of eligible claims, then 25 per cent. of the rest.

The Government believe that public resources for social housing should be allocated directly towards meeting priority needs in ways which produce good value for money. The Government are not convinced that the continued availability of tax relief grant would help achieve this. We therefore remain committed to its abolition when an appropriate legislative opportunity arises. In the meantime, although the statutory discretion to pay tax relief grant will remain, the Government would normally expect that, following the planned reductions outlined, associations will take steps to manage without tax relief grant payments.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Resource Accounting

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Attorney-General what progress his Department is making with the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting; and in respect of which financial year he expects to publish the first set of resource accounts. [4987]

The Solicitor-General: All the Departments and agencies for which the Law Officers are responsible will be introducing resource accounting systems during 1997, apart from the Serious Fraud Office which has already done so. The Law Officers' Departments and agencies, in common with other Departments, are preparing to implement resource budgeting in time to form the basis for the 2000 survey. As set out in Cm 2929, their first published resource accounts will be in respect of 1999–2000.

TRANSPORT

M6–M65 Link

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the additional traffic at *(a)* Blackburn, *(b)* Burnley and *(c)* Colne when the M6–M65 link-up is complete. [5240]

Mr. Watts: When the M65 Blackburn southern bypass is complete it is expected that the traffic could increase by about 10 per cent.—4,500 vehicles per day—east of M65 junction 6 at Whitebirk, Blackburn.

No estimate has been made of the increase in traffic on the M65 at Burnley or Colne.

Rail Freight

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had and with whom on encouraging heavy freight goods to travel by rail; and if he will make a statement. [5392]

Mr. Watts: Encouraging freight to travel by rail is an important element of the Government's transport policy. My right hon. Friend and I have frequent discussions with customers, operators and other interest groups.

Visual Flight Rules Procedures

Sir Keith Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consult with the Civil Aviation Authority to assess whether the existing visual flight rules procedures are adequate or in need of revision. [4804]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 20 November]:* Visual flight rules procedures in the UK comply with the minimum standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organisation and contained in annexe 2 to the convention on international civil aviation. The Civil Aviation Authority is not aware of any problems with current VFR procedures but, as with all safety issues, they are kept under review.

MV Cap Afrique

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what was the total number of passengers and crew the MV Cap Afrique was carrying when it sailed at 17.30 hours from Dover on 6 November; [5408]

(2) how many passengers and crew in total the vessel MV Cap Afrique is permitted to carry. [5407]

Mr. Bowis: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Elliot Morley, dated 21 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Questions about the total number of passengers and crew carried by the MV "Cap Afrique".

The MV "Cap Afrique" is a French registered ro-ro cargo ship. The total number of passengers and crew on board the ship when it sailed from Dover at 17.30 hours on 6 November was 25 persons. The total number of passengers and crew that MV "Cap Afrique" is permitted to carry is 30 persons.

Resource Accounting

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress his Department is making with the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting; and in respect of which financial year he expects to publish the first set of resource accounts. [4994]

Mr. Bowis: My Department will be introducing its resource accounting system on 1 April 1998. The Department is preparing to implement resource budgeting in time to form the basis for the year 2000 survey. In accordance with Cm 2929, the first published resource accounts for the Department and all other Departments will be in respect of 1999–2000.

Air Freight

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made towards negotiating an open skies agreement for air freight between the United Kingdom and the United States; and if he will make a statement. [5460]

Mr. Bowis: Talks with the US Government about UK-US air services are continuing, with formal negotiations taking place in London on 4 to 6 December. Cargo services are one of the issues for discussion.

HOME DEPARTMENT

West Midlands Serious Crimes Squad

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those people convicted with the help of assistance from the west midlands serious crimes squad who have subsequently had their convictions overturned and the amount of compensation paid to each of them. [5000]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not available.

Closed Circuit Television

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications he has received from local authorities for CCTV installations; and if he will make a statement. [4828]

Mr. Maclean: Applications to the Home Office closed circuit television challenge competitions are made by local CCTV partnerships. Such partnerships are not necessarily led by local authorities, though most will involve them in some way. There were 480 bids in the first competition and 794 in the second. The closing date for bids in the third round of the competition was 20 November 1996.

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of CCTV systems in crime reduction. [4827]

Mr. Maclean: The reports that we have received from the police and closed circuit television operators confirm that there have been significant reductions in crime and the fear of crime in the areas where CCTV has been introduced. These reductions demonstrate the value of CCTV as a crime prevention measure. In addition, we have published a number of research papers examining various aspects of CCTV effectiveness, the latest of which was "CCTV in Town Centres: Three Case Studies", published in November 1995.

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many CCTV systems have been installed in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [4829]

Mr. Maclean: Information about closed circuit television systems which have not received Home Office funding is not collected. Of those schemes which have received funding from the Home Office, 73 have been installed in the past 12 months. Approximately 250 more are in the process of installation.

Animal Testing

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funding the Government have made available for research into alternatives to animal testing in the past five years; what plans he has to increase this funding; and if he will make a statement. [5012]

Mr. Sackville: Figures for the total Government spending on research into alternatives to the use of animals in scientific procedures are not available. With regard to the Animal Procedures Committee, the Home Office has in the last five years made the following funds available:

1991–92: £215,000
1992–93: £253,000
1993–94: £308,000
1994–95: £273,000
1995–96: £253,000.

There are no plans to increase the level of funding.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a list of the applications which his Department has received in the

past year for licences to carry out animal tests, and the reasons why the applications were granted or not; and if he will make a statement. [5014]

Mr. Sackville: Section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 prohibits the disclosure of such information.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken to ensure that research into alternative methods to animal testing and the validation of such methods by public bodies and private companies is co-ordinated; and if he will make a statement. [5016]

Mr. Sackville: The United Kingdom Government helped to establish and subsequently endorsed the European centre for the validation of alternative methods—ECVAM. It is the job of the centre to co-ordinate research into alternative methods including developmental and subsequent validation work.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to revise the licensing process for animal tests; if he will make it his policy to include *(a)* more rigorous cost-benefit analysis for the proposed testing, *(b)* details of what alternative tests have been considered and *(c)* the reasons why such alternatives cannot be used instead of the animal tests; and if he will make a statement. [5013]

Mr. Sackville: We have no plans to revise the licensing process. We are satisfied that the current cost-benefit analysis required under section 5[4] of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 is sufficiently rigorous. The need to consider alternative tests is adequately addressed by section 5[5] of the Act.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken at an international level to ensure that alternative methods to animal tests are accepted by regulatory authorities in other countries; and if he will make a statement. [5015]

Mr. Sackville: The acceptance of alternative methods can be achieved only by their validation and incorporation into harmonisation processes and international guidelines, such as those promulgated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

To this end, the Home Office jointly commissioned, in 1995, a study of the Draize eye irritation test and is liaising closely with regulators who represent United Kingdom interests in international forums.

Resource Accounting

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress his Department is making with the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting; and in respect of which financial year he expects to publish the first set of resource accounts. [4980]

Mr. Howard: My Department, on current plans, will be introducing its resource accounting capability during 1997–98 and, in common with other Departments, is preparing to implement resource budgeting in time to form the basis for the year 2000 public expenditure survey. As set out in Cm 2929, the first published resource accounts for the Department will be for the 1999–2000 financial year.

Mr. Raghbir Singh

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on *(a)* the retention in prison of Mr. Raghbir Singh and *(b)* the basis for his continued detention following the decision by the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Karanjit Singh Chahal. [5149]

Mr. Howard: These matters are under review and I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Paedophile Register and Stalking Bills

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when drafts of the proposed paedophile register Bill and the proposed stalking Bill were prepared; and when the Bills will be published. [5251]

Mr. Maclean: Preparation of the Bills is well advanced and we will introduce them as soon as possible.

Electronic Tagging

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women who were electronically tagged in England and Wales as at 18 November. [5507]

Mr. Sackville: By 18 November, 202 male and 14 female offenders had been tagged to monitor their compliance with curfew orders since the pilot trials began in July 1995.

Dogs (Tail Docking)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make illegal the docking of dog tails for non-veterinary reasons. [5404]

Mr. Sackville: There are no plans to do so.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Environmental Auditing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list the ways in which his Department has *(a)* demonstrated by example and *(b)* promoted externally, the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing; and if he will make a statement. [4540]

Mr. Newton: The Privy Council Office has no direct responsibilities for environmental auditing. In common with other Departments, the office seeks to exercise economy in the use of resources and to minimise waste.

Resource Accounting

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Lord President of the Council what progress his Department is making with the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting; and in respect of which financial year he expects to publish the first set of resource accounts. [4990]

Mr. Newton: The Privy Council Office will be introducing its resource accounting system during 1997–98. In common with other Departments, the PCO is preparing to implement resource budgeting in time to

form the basis for the year 2000 survey. As set out in Cm 2929, the first published resource accounts for the PCO and all other Departments will be in respect of the year 1999–2000.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Environmental Auditing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will list the ways in which the commissioners have *(a)* demonstrated by example and *(b)* promoted externally, the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing; and if he will make a statement. [4545]

Mr. Alison: Within their offices at No. 1 Millbank, the commissioners recycle aluminium cans and cardboard, and a paper recycling scheme is to be introduced by the end of the year. Where appropriate, the commissioners buy recycled materials. In addition, the heating system is computer controlled to minimise wastage and a heat recovery system is in operation. The commissioners are in the process of installing long-life, low-energy lamps throughout their offices.

The commissioners ensure that the needs of the environment and of the local community are properly taken into account in the management of their agricultural estates. On many of the commissioners' residential estates, heat loss—and thereby energy consumption—have been reduced by double glazing, draft proofing and loft insulation. Energy-saving light bulbs are used in the common parts of many buildings and, in conjunction with the Energy Saving Trust, they are installing energy-saving boilers which emit waste that is more environmentally friendly. They also maintain a number of communal gardens on their estates and paper re-cycling is carried out at one of the estate offices.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Union

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of his Department's time and resources is spent dealing with administrative and policy matters connected with British membership of the European Union. [4955]

Mr. David Davis: Many Foreign and Commonwealth Office home departments and overseas posts are involved, to varying degrees, in activities related to Britain's membership of the European Union. The actual percentage of time and resources spent dealing with British membership of the European Union could be calculated only at disproportionate cost.

MEPs (Pensions)

Sir Peter Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contributions are required from United Kingdom public funds for pensions of United Kingdom Members of the European Parliament; what qualifications are required for drawing such pensions; and to what extent increased pensions are financed through voluntary contributions. [4925]

Mr. David Davis: Pension arrangements for United Kingdom Members of the European Parliament are analogous to those for Members of the House of Commons. They are financed by the Exchequer and by contributions from individual MEP's at a rate of 6 per cent. of basic salary. Pensions are normally payable from age 65, based upon the MEPs, length of service and salary during the last 12 months in office. Opportunities are provided for MEPs to transfer service from other pension schemes, to purchase added years, and to make additional voluntary contributions, subject to Inland Revenue limits. Pension payments from UK public funds to former UK MEPs and dependants amounted to £159,000 in 1994–95, with a further £117,000 paid in transfer valued to other schemes.

MEPs may also subscribe to the EP's additional voluntary pensions scheme, two-thirds of payments to which are made from the EP section of the EC budget and one-third by the MEP. MEPs may draw a pension from this scheme from the age of 60 and after ceasing to hold office, if they have paid personal contributions for five years or more. The 1997 EC draft budget includes 11.6 million ecu, or £8.9 million, for EP payments to the scheme. The UK contribution is not hypothecated to individual budget lines, but expressed as a gross contribution to the total EC budget. The expected cost to the UK of abated expenditure such as administration is about 5 per cent. of the total.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the cost in the last 12 months of sending Ministers and officials to meetings in Brussels and elsewhere in Europe in connection with his Department's handling of EU business. [4945]

Mr. Davis: Journeys to European destinations are not recorded according to the purpose of the visit and the information requested could therefore be made available only at disproportionate cost.

Resource Accounting

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress his Department is making with the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting; and in respect of which financial year he expects to publish the first set of resource accounts. [4982]

Mr. Hanley: We are making good progress towards our aim of producing resource accounts for financial year 1998–99. As set out in Cm 2929, the first published resource accounts for this Department and all other Departments will be in respect of 1999–2000.

British Detainees (Venezuela)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he took following the latest meeting between the hon. Member for Leicester, East and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to make representations to the Venezuelan Government concerning the cases of Paul Loseby and James Miles;

when he was notified that Mr. Loseby and Mr. Miles were to be charged; and when consular officials last met Mr. James Miles and Mr. Paul Loseby. [5295]

Dr. Liam Fox: Following representations by the British ambassador in Caracas, the Venezuelan authorities have agreed that for the time being James Miles and Paul Loseby will be kept in police custody rather than being transferred to prison.

Consular officials in Caracas were told that Miles and Loseby were to be charged at 1900 hrs GMT on 19 November.

Consular officials last met James Miles and Paul Loseby on 19 November.

Arms Supplies (Rwanda and Zaire)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) when he first received reports alleging that British companies were arranging indirect arms transfers to *(a)* Hutu refugees or *(b)* other groups in Zaire; [5300]

(2) when he was first informed of allegations of arms sales to Rwanda or Zaire by British companies after April 1994; and what steps he took to investigate; [5301]

(3) when the Government first received reports of the possible involvement of Mil-Tec Corporation Ltd. in the export of armaments whose final destination was *(a)* Rwanda and *(b)* Zaire; and if he will make a statement. [5294]

Mr. David Davis: There were rumours in the press of arms shipments to Zaire in 1994. HM Customs informed this Department in early 1995 that they were investigating allegations that arms were being supplied to Rwanda or Zaire. They also investigated information received from the UN in September 1996. No evidence to support criminal proceedings was found. Recent allegations of arms supplies to Rwandan extremists by United Kingdom companies are being pursued. Her Majesty's Government continue to co-operate closely with the UN international commission of inquiry.

I cannot comment in detail on individual cases in these circumstances but would urge those with the relevant background to provide it to HM Customs to assist their investigation.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure that no British companies are involved in the supply of arms to the combatants in the current conflict in the great lakes region of Africa; and if he will make a statement. [5368]

Mr. Davis: Order in Council 1993 No. 1787 as amended by No. 1637 of 22 June 1994 provides that, except under licence, no person shall:

"(a) supply or deliver

(b) agree to supply or deliver

(c) do any act likely to promote the supply or delivery of prohibited goods to Rwanda, or to, or to the order of, a person connected with Rwanda, or to any destination for the purpose of delivery, directly or indirectly, to Rwanda, or to, or to the order of, any person connected with Rwanda."

This applies to any person within the UK and to any person elsewhere who is a British national or a company incorporated in the UK. This includes British citizens in the Isle of Man and Channel Islands. The Government will extend the legislation to cover, inter alia, companies there at the earliest opportunity.

As announced on 19 November 1996, the Government have tasked an interdepartmental committee to examine rigorously our procedures in relation to trafficking in arms and to determine whether there has been a gap in our controls and if so what action needs to be taken.

Official Residences

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the official residences owned by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in *(a)* Japan, *(b)* Korea, *(c)* Singapore, *(d)* Hong Kong, *(e)* Thailand and *(f)* Malaysia; and if he will indicate (1) the occasions when Cabinet Ministers on official visits to those countries have (i) used the official residence and (ii) used a residence other than the official residence since 1979 and (2) the cost involved. [4733]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 20 November 1996]:* The following official residences are owned:

Korea—Seoul

Singapore

Thailand—Bangkok

Malaysia—Kuala Lumpur

The residence in Tokyo is held on a long lease.

The remainder of the information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Millennium Exhibition

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment was made by her Department, before awarding the millennium exhibition to Greenwich, of the impact on local traffic and travel facilities of *(a)* the construction phase and *(b)* the operation of the exhibition. [3705]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The decision to hold the millennium exhibition at Greenwich was taken by the Millennium Commission. My Department had no role in the decision. I shall write to the hon. Member about the commission's assessment of the exhibition's impact on local traffic and travel facilities in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

National Lottery

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list *(a)* the number of projects which have received funding from the national lottery since its inception and *(b)* the number of projects currently under consideration by the national lottery for funding in (i) England, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Wales. [3864]

Mr. Sproat: To date, the national lottery distributing bodies have awarded a total of £2,421,238,117 to 10,681 projects. Applications currently under consideration by the distributing bodies are as follows:

Name of distributing body	*Number of applications under consideration*
England	
Sports Council for England	1,393
Arts Council for England	220
Millennium Commission	28
Heritage Lottery Fund	947
National Lottery Charities Board	7,222
Total	9,810
Scotland	
Scottish Sports Council	487
Scottish Arts Council	129
Millennium Commission	1
Heritage Lottery Fund	116
National Lottery Charities Board	1,125
Total	1,858
Wales	
Arts Council of Wales	208
Sports Council of Wales	194
Millennium Commission	0
Heritage Lottery Fund	87
National Lottery Charities Board	1,057
Total	1,546

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list *(a)* the number of projects in Northern Ireland which have received funding from the proceeds of the national lottery since its inception and *(b)* the number of projects from Northern Ireland currently under consideration for funding by the national lottery. [3843]

Mr. Sproat: To date, the national lottery distributing bodies have awarded a total of £44,457,207 to 624 projects in Northern Ireland. Applications currently under consideration by the distributing bodies, in Northern Ireland, are as follows:

Northern Ireland

Name of distributing body	*Number of applications under consideration*
Arts Council of Northern Ireland	178
Sports Council for Northern Ireland	153
Millennium Commission	6
Heritage Lottery Fund	41
National Lottery Charities Board	324
Total	702

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list *(a)* the number of projects which have been given funding by the Millennium Commission and *(b)* the number of projects currently under consideration by the Millennium Commission, for (i) England, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Wales. [3845]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall write to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

"Sport: Raising the Game"

Mr. Mark Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the implementation of Government sports policies set down in the document, "Sport: Raising the Game". [3999]

Mr. Sproat: In July 1995 the Government set out in "Sport: Raising the Game", its strategy for revitalising British sport at all levels from primary schools to the Olympic podium. Our aim is to put sport at the heart of weekly life in every school, to ensure that sporting opportunities continue after school, to improve the way we identify and support talented athletes, and to create a British academy of sport as the pinnacle of regional network of centres of sporting excellence and academies for particular sports.

Last July, in "Sport: Raising the Game", the first year report, we provided a detailed update which showed that significant progress had been made on the 38 action points set out in the original sports policy statement. This included the publication of the prospectus inviting bids to establish the British academy of sport.

Since July, further progress has been made. The Sports Council's £1 million challenge fund, to encourage schools–sports club links, has been launched; secondary schools have been invited to apply for the sportsmark and sportsmark gold awards, which recognise those schools that have particularly good policies for sport; teachers have been invited to attend free courses to help them gain national governing body of sport awards; and, on 14 November, the Sports Council launched its world class performance programme to provide support to our most talented athletes competing up to olympic and world championship level.

Hampstead Garden Suburb

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects to decide upon the proposal to list further houses in Hampstead Garden Suburb. [3970]

Mr. Sproat: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce her decision shortly.

Child Care Workers

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what guidance she has issued to the voluntary sector in respect of *(a)* training arrangements and *(b)* checks on the suitability of personnel working with children. [4361]

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage makes grants totalling nearly £12 million annually to organisations which support a healthy, cost-effective voluntary sector and promote volunteering. A number of these organisations are funded to provide a range of services to other voluntary organisations, including training.

Departments may issue guidance to voluntary organisations working in areas relevant to Departmental interests. For instance in 1993 the Home Office, in consultation with the Department of Health, the then Department for Education and the Welsh Office published "Safe from Harm: A Code of Practice for Safeguarding the Welfare of Children in Voluntary Organisations in England and Wales". The code offered a guide to good policy and practice in areas such as recruitment, supervision and management, and set out recommendations and statements of principle which voluntary organisations are asked to consider in the light of their own particular circumstances.

Guidance to voluntary organisations seeking checks on the suitability of personnel working with children was issued in 1994—Home Office Circular 42/94, Department of Health Local Authority Circular (94)22, Welsh Office Circular 64/94—"Protection of Children: Disclosure of Criminal Background to Voluntary Sector Organisations" which set out the criteria for obtaining criminal record checks for use by voluntary organisations which were members of the voluntary organisations consultancy service.

Copies of both the code of practice and the circular are available in the Library of the House.

Proposals for new arrangements for access to criminal record checks are in the Police Bill, currently before Parliament.

Elite Athletes

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on scholarship funding for élite athletes. [4693]

Mr. Sproat: The Government are committed, as part of their overarching strategy for sport, to seeing our leading sportsmen and sportswomen compete successfully in the olympics and other international events. The launch of the world class performance programme, this month, will provide support across the United Kingdom to our most talented athletes competing up to olympic and world championship level.

Up to £35 million a year will be available through the programme. Around half of this money will go to governing bodies for technical support services, such as coaching, altitude and warm weather training; the other half will go to individual athletes to cover normal living costs, personal training and travelling costs, allocated on the basis of need. Average awards to individual athletes are expected to be around £16,000 to £17,000, but the size of the individual awards will depend on personal circumstances. In return for lottery awards the sports concerned and the athletes who benefit, will be required to make a commitment to excellence in training and competition which will be closely monitored.

The world class performance programme is the first of only four separate revenue grant programmes. The three further programmes will be designed to attract and stage major international events in the UK, to provide community coaching and leadership schemes, and to identify better and develop the talent in the country's schools and sports clubs.

Environmental Auditing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the ways in which her Department has *(a)* demonstrated by example and *(b)* promoted externally, the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing; and if she will make a statement. [4528]

Mr. Sproat: My Department undertakes environmental auditing primarily through environmental appraisal of policies and monitoring performance of green housekeeping matters.

In respect of environmental appraisal of policies, as my Department operates mainly through a range of non-departmental bodies, they are dealt with by customised guidance. An example is "Option Appraisal of Expenditure Decisions: A Guide for the DNH and its NDPB's", published in March 1996. Within the key heritage and tourism sectors, planning policy guidance no. 15: "Planning and the Historic Environment", and Planning Policy Guidance no. 21 are relevant.

In November 1995 in partnership with the English tourist board, the Countryside Commission and the Rural Development Commission, my Department published "Sustainable Rural Tourism: Opportunities for Local Action". This gives practical advice on how to ensure rural tourism is in harmony with the environment.

As far as green housekeeping is concerned we have published a strategy for our buildings and have targets to reduce energy consumption. There are also several waste minimisation policies to include recycling of paper, glass, plastic cups and cans. We are to purchase a range of greener stationery items.

British Museum

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the present funding of the British museum to support the staffing levels necessary to fulfil its statutory obligations. [4579]

Mr. Sproat: The Government are still considering the British museum's case for funding. Among many factors to be taken into account will be the recently published report by Mr. Andrew Edwards, which was commissioned by the British museum and commented in some detail on staffing levels at the museum. Grant-in-aid allocations will be announced immediately after the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement.

European Union

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what percentage of her Department's time and resources are spent dealing with administrative and policy matters connected with British membership of the European Union. [4958]

Mr. Sproat: Detailed records are not kept, which would allow such a percentage to be calculated. However, most sections of the Department are involved in some way with European Union business.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what has been the cost in the last 12 months of sending ministers and officials to meetings in Brussels and elsewhere in Europe in connection with his Department's handling of EU business. [4948]

Mr. Sproat: The cost of attendance by Department of National Heritage Ministers and officials during the period 1 November 1995–31 October 1996 at European Union meetings was £48,516.16. This includes travel costs which may be subsequently refunded by the European Commission.

British Steel Industry

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she is taking to promote educational and tourist interest in the British steel industry. [4842]

Mr. Sproat: Britain has a unique industrial heritage which is of interest to both domestic and overseas visitors. Funding is made available through the English tourist board and the regional tourist boards for the development and promotion of tourism within England. Through their activities the tourist boards help stimulate interest in a wide range of activities and types of development all over the country, including many industry-based attractions, and the ETB designated 1993 as Industrial Heritage Year.

Museums and Heritage Centres

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the museums or heritage centres covering the history and national heritage of *(a)* the rail industry, *(b)* the coal industry, *(c)* the car industry and *(d)* the steel industry. [4841]

Mr. Sproat: The Museum and Galleries Commission's DOMUS database identifies the following museums as being wholly or partly devoted to the history of the rail, coach, car or steel industries:

Railways
Birmingham Railway Museum
Bo'ness and Kinneil Railway
Buckinghamshire Railway Centre
Cheddleton Railway Centre
Crail Museum
Darlington Railway Museum
Dean Forest Railway Society Museum
Didcot Railway Centre
Downpartrick Steam Railway
East Anglian Railway Museum
Embsay Steam Railway
Festiniog Railway Museum
Foxfield Steam Railway
Foyle Valley Railway
Great Western Railway Museum: Thamesdown Museums Service
Irchester Narrow Gauge Railway Museum
Isle of Wight Steam Railway
Kidderminster Railway Museum
Leighton Buzzard Railway Museum
Midland Railway Centre
Narrow Gauge Railway Museum
Newton Abbot Town and Great Western Railway Museum
The National Railway Museum
North Norfolk Railway
North Yorkshire Moors Railway
Railway Museum, Raven glass
Railway Preservation Society of Ireland
Railway Village Museum
Railworld
Rutland Railway Museum
Somerset and Dorset Railway Trust Museum
Southport Railway Centre
Stephenson Railway Museum, Tyne and Wear Museums
Tanfield Railway
Timothy Hackworth Victorian and Railway Museum
Winchcombe Railway Museum

Coal
Big Pit Mining Museum
Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery
Lancashire Mining Museum
National Coal Mining Museum for England
Scottish Mining Museum

Motor Industry and Cars
Atwell-Wilson Motor Museum
Automobilia Transport Museum
Autoworld at the Patrick Collection
Betws-Y-Coed Motor Museum
Birmingham Museum of Science and Industry
Brooklands Museum
Bugatti Trust
C. M. Booth Collection of Historic Vehicles
Dalbeattie Museum Trust Ltd.
Doune Collection
Grampian Transport Museum
Haynes Motor Museum
Heritage Motor Centre
Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust
Jersey Motor Museum
Lakeland Motor Museum
Manx Motor Museum
Museum of British Road Transport
National Motor Museum
Newburn Hall Motor Museum
Totnes Motor Museum

Steel
Abbeydale Industrial Hamlet
Cyfarthfa Castle Museum
Millom Folk Museum
Kelham Island Museum.

Next year, Science Museum, London, will be opening the "Challenge of Materials Gallery" including exhibits connected with the steel industry.

There is no definitive listing of heritage centres available held centrally.

Amsterdam (Wreck)

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what recent discussions her Department has had with the Dutch authorities about the protection of the wreck of the Amsterdam. [4707]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 20 November 1996]:* The Dutch Government are the owners of the wreck of the Amsterdam and, therefore, have prime responsibility for decisions about its future. However, the Amsterdam is a designated site under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973, for which my Department has responsibility. My Department and the Dutch Government, therefore, have discussions as appropriate about the Amsterdam and its protection.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what information is collated centrally on *(a)* the long-term revenue commitments and *(b)* any other commitments arising as a result of private finance initiative projects agreed by (i) her Department and (ii) agencies accountable to her Department. [5080]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 20 November 1996]:* The Government response to the Treasury Committee report on the private finance initiative agreed the importance of collecting and monitoring information on future spending commitments arising from contracts under the private finance initiative. Such information is now being collected twice yearly, in April and October. A joint review of the position by the Treasury and the Department is triggered if these commitments in total exceed 15 per cent. of the Department's discretionary expenditure. The response stated that aggregate projections of the level of expenditure that is anticipated to arise from signed contracts under the initiative would be published n the 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report".

Arts Funding

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimate she has made of the level of public funding for the arts per head of population *(a)* in the south-west region, and *(b)* in the rest of Britain. [3179]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* Central Government funding for the arts in Britain, provided through the three arts councils, the Crafts Council and the Government's pairing scheme, amounts to £234 million in 1996–97. Additionally, local authorities spend a similar amount on the arts each year. From these sources the estimate of current level of public funding per capita on the arts in the south-west region is approximately £5.86, compared with an overall average £8.24 for England, Scotland and Wales. In addition, it is anticipated that the arts' share of lottery awards in England, Scotland and Wales will be in the region of £300 million this year, or £5.29 a head. There are also other sources of arts funding generated through Government expenditure: either directly, such as through the BBC—an estimated £300 per annum—or indirectly, such as through European spending programmes. Each of these elements of funding benefits the south-west alongside other areas of Britain.

Millennium Celebrations

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on plans for regional celebrations of the millennium. [2842]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* There will be a series of national events in 1998 and 1999 associated with the millennium exhibition. The Millennium Commission has not yet decided what funding it may give to other events. In addition to events supported by the commission, there will be a range of local events, organised and funded by local authorities, local businesses, and local people.

TREASURY

Agency Co-operation

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 29 October, *Official Report*, column *61*, if he will make available a list of the projects in hand on closer working between the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the Contributions Agency. [3195]

Mr. Jack: The information requested will shortly be placed in the House Library.

Utilities Windfall Tax

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the effective annual rate of tax on output prices of a utilities windfall tax which is fully passed on to consumers and which raises (i) £3 billion, (2) £5 billion and (3) £10 billion annually from privatised utilities in *(a)* the water sector, *(b)* the electricity sector, *(c)* the gas sector, *(d)* the telecommunications sector, *(e)* a, b and *c* and *(f)* *b* and *c*. [3223]

Mr. Jack: Information on the effect of a utilities windfall tax on output prices is not available and cannot readily be estimated because of the wide range of assumptions that would be involved.

Suicides

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the number of suicides among under-30s, broken down by gender, in England for each year since 1985. [3833]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Cynog Dafis, dated 21 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how many suicides in males and females under 30, took place each year since 1985.

The figures for England are given in the attached table.

Suicides[1] in the under-30s, 1985–1995

Year	*Males*	*Females*
1985	770	184
1986	803	225
1987	864	252
1988	990	227
1989	948	242
1990	1,089	233
1991	991	213
1992	1,007	232

Suicides[1] in the under-30s, 1985–1995

Year	Males	Females
1993	939	224
1994	985	200
1995	899	213

[1] International classification of diseases, 9th revision, codes E950–E959, E980–E989 excl. E988.8.

Employee Share Ownership

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the impact on employee share ownership plans of the proposal by the accounting standards board to implement its urgent issues task force proposal in respect of employee share schemes; [3899]

(2) what discussions he has had with the accounting standards board about reporting employee share ownership schemes in profit and loss accounts. [3908]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The take–up of employee share ownership plans will be determined by a wide range of factors and it is not possible to make a precise estimate of the impact on take–up of individual factors. The Treasury has not discussed the UITF proposals with the ASB. However, I understand that the UITF has received a number of representations of concern about the inclusion of save as you earn employee share schemes within the scope of its proposals covering employee share schemes generally.

Maternal Deaths

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 4 November, *Official Report*, column *401*, (1) how many of the women whose deaths in 1991 to 1993 were directly due to maternity were born in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the Republic of Ireland, *(c)* the new Commonwealth and Pakistan, *(d)* other countries and *(e)* unstated countries, as recorded on the death registration; [4491]

(2) how many of the women whose deaths in 1991 to 1993 were indirectly due to maternity were born in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the Republic of Ireland, *(c)* the new Commonwealth and Pakistan, *(d)* other countries and *(e)* unstated countries, as recorded on the death registration. [4490]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Audrey Wise, dated 21 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the number deaths in England and Wales to women whose death was directly or indirectly due to maternity for the years 1991–1993.

The figures requested for direct deaths are shown in the attached table. They cover deaths due to complications of pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium (International Classification of Diseases code 630–76) and are derived from death registrations. The numbers provided differ from those which can be obtained from the Report on the Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths in the United Kingdom 1991–1993. This Enquiry uses information from several different sources. Before 1993, deaths data was only available by underlying cause of death.

Indirect deaths are deaths resulting from previous existing disease, or disease that developed during pregnancy and which was not due to direct obstetric causes, but which was aggravated by the physiologic effects of pregnancy. These will not necessarily be identified from the death certificate. Therefore they cannot be included in the table.

Deaths in England and Wales due to complications of pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium, 1991 to 1993

	Underlying cause of death			Other mentions		
	1991	1992	1993	1991	1992	1993
All countries	45	45	36	n/a	n/a	9
United Kingdom	34	29	31	n/a	n/a	7
Republic of Ireland	—	1	—	n/a	n/a	—
New Commonwealth and Pakistan	7	7	5	n/a	n/a	2
Other countries	4	8	—	n/a	n/a	—
Unstated countries	—	—	—	n/a	n/a	—

Unemployment

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the *(a)* percentage and *(b)* numerical difference in unemployment rates between the United Kingdom and (i) Germany and (ii) France in each of the past 24 months. [4360]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Peter Bottomley, dated 21 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on unemployment in the United Kingdom, Germany and France.

The information you requested is given in the attached table. This is based on the International Labour Office (ILO) measure of unemployment which provides a like for like basis for international comparisons. The ILO measure of unemployment is a count of people without a job who were available to start work in the two weeks following their Labour Force Survey interview and who had either looked for work in the four weeks prior to interview or were waiting to start a job they already obtained.

Annual average numbers of ILO unemployed in member countries are published by Eurostat in their monthly Unemployment Bulletin, available in the House of Commons Library.

Seasonally adjusted ILO unemployment September 1994 to September 1996

	Unemployment rate per cent.			Percentage point difference UK compared with	
	UK	France	Germany	France	Germany
September 1994	9.4	12.2	8.3	–2.8	1.1
October	9.2	12.1	8.2	–2.9	1.0
November	9.1	12.0	8.2	–2.9	0.9
December	9.0	11.9	8.1	–2.9	0.9
January 1995	8.9	11.8	8.1	–2.9	0.8
February	8.8	11.7	8.1	–2.9	0.7

Seasonally adjusted ILO unemployment September 1994 to September 1996

	Unemployment rate per cent.			*Percentage point difference UK compared with*	
	UK	*France*	*Germany*	*France*	*Germany*
March	8.9	11.6	8.1	–2.7	0.8
April	8.8	11.5	8.1	–2.7	0.7
May	8.8	11.5	8.1	–2.7	0.7
June	8.8	11.4	8.2	–2.6	0.6
July	8.8	11.4	8.2	–2.9	0.5
August	8.7	11.6	8.2	–2.9	0.5
September	8.7	11.6	8.3	–2.9	0.4
October	8.7	11.7	8.4	–3.0	0.3
November	8.6	11.9	8.5	–3.3	0.1
December	8.4	12.0	8.6	–3.6	–0.2
January 1996	8.3	12.0	8.7	–3.7	–0.4
February	8.4	12.1	8.9	–3.7	–0.5
March	8.4	12.1	9.0	–3.7	–0.6
April	8.4	12.1	8.9	–3.7	–0.5
May	8.3	12.2	8.9	–3.9	–0.6
June	8.3	12.3	8.9	–4.0	–0.6
July	8.2	12.3	8.9	–4.1	–0.7
August	8.2	12.4	8.9	–4.2	–0.7
September	8.1	12.5	9.0	–4.4	–0.9

Source:
Eurostat (the statistical Office of the European Community, or SOEC).

Environmental Auditing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the ways in which his Department has *(a)* demonstrated by example and *(b)* promoted externally, the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing; and if he will make a statement. [4534]

Mrs. Angela Knight: An environmental assessment using the Building Research Establishment "toolkit" has been carried out at the offices occupied by HM Treasury at Allington Towers in Victoria with a view to accreditation under ISO 14001. Extending the assessment to the main building in Parliament street—Government offices, Great George street—is not cost-effective, given the proposed redevelopment and the short time we expect to remain in the building in its current configuration. We are paying particular attention to the drive for energy efficiency to be fully recognised in the proposed redevelopment where an "excellent" rating under the Building Research Establishment environmental assessment method system is required.

External promotion of environmental auditing is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry and the Environment.

Coinage (Metal Content)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes have occurred in the metal content of United Kingdom coinage in the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [4817]

Mrs. Angela Knight: From September 1992 onwards, all 1p and 2p coins dated 1992 were made of copper-plated steel instead of bronze.

Transport, Agriculture and Fishing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes in policy his Department has made during the last 12 months in respect of *(a)* transport, *(b)* agriculture and (c) the fishing industry; and if he will make a statement. [5137]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Policy responsibility on transport lies with the Secretary of State for Transport. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is responsible for policies on agriculture and fisheries.

Tax Overpayments

Ms Lynne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total amount spent by his Department on advertising and publicity relating to the opportunities for people to reclaim overpayments in tax; and what proportion of this is specifically targeted at pensioners. [4734]

Mr. Jack: Since 1991 the Inland Revenue has had six national publicity initiatives encouraging savers, especially pensioners, who are paying too much tax on their savings income to claim it back. Approximately £12.9 million has been spent during this period on advertising and publicity.

The campaigns have told savers who are entitled to tax back how to claim, and non-taxpayers to tell their bank and building society not to take tax off in the future.

Oral Cancer

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors have delayed the availability of information regarding the incidence of oral cancer since 1991 as referred to in his answer of 15 October, *Official Report*, column *837–38*. [2725]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 7 November 1996]:* The process of cancer registration in England and Wales is carried out by 11 regional cancer registries, over which the Office for National Statistics has no statutory or managerial control. The process of registration is often very complex and often delayed pending the completion of treatment. ONS can only produce national results once the information is available from all registries. Several have introduced new computer systems and ONS is developing its processes which should help to enable overall figures to be produced more quickly.

Unemployment

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list figures for the number and percentage of the *(a)* male, *(b)* female and *(c)* total work force who have experienced at least one spell of unemployment since (i) autumn 1990 and (ii) spring 1992, and if he will provide figures by region; [2818]

(2) if he will list the number and percentage of the work force in each of the main occupational categories who have experienced at least one spell of unemployment since *(a)* autumn 1990 and *(b)* spring 1992. [2819]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 12 November 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Peter Hain, dated 21 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent questions 2818 and 2819 on spells of claimant unemployment.

The available data relate to Great Britain and are shown in the attached tables. National figures are expressed as a percentage of the working age population—regional denominators are not available. Equivalent figures do not exist on the number of people who have ever been in the workforce.

Occupational information is only available from January 1995 and therefore does not cover the period requested.

Number of people in Great Britain who have experienced at least one spell of claimant unemployment since 1 September 1990 and 12 September 1996, by sex and region

Thousands

Region	*Males*	*Females*	*Total*
Greater London	1,175.8	665.9	1,841.7
Rest of South East	1,202.6	638.4	1,841.0
East Anglia	246.0	135.4	381.4
South West	601.5	338.1	939.6
West Midlands	703.9	385.7	1,089.6
East Midlands	499.7	273.4	773.1
Yorkshire and Humberside	679.8	368.8	1,048.6
North West	897.6	482.3	1,379.9
North	439.5	227.5	667.0
Wales	372.7	196.7	569.4
Scotland	702.5	405.0	1,107.5
Great Britain	7,512.8	4,117.2	11,638.9

Percentage of the working age population in Great Britain who have experienced at least one spell of claimant unemployment since 1990 to 1996, by sex

	Males	*Females*	*Total*
Great Britain	37	22	30

Number of people in Great Britain who have experienced at least one spell of claimant unemployment since 1 April 1992 and 12 September 1996, by sex and region

thousands

Region	*Males*	*Females*	*Total*
Greater London	1,037.9	559.0	1,596.9
Rest of South East	1,050.0	530.7	1,580.7
East Anglia	215.9	112.9	328.7
South West	525.9	279.0	804.9
West Midlands	617.9	316.7	934.6
East Midlands	438.8	225.5	664.3
Yorkshire and Humberside	595.1	300.7	895.8
North West	779.4	388.6	1,168.0
North	389.3	183.0	572.3
Wales	322.3	160.9	483.2
Scotland	617.1	327.6	944.7
Great Britain	6,589.5	3,384.5	9,974.0

Percentage of the working age population in Great Britain who have experienced at least one spell of claimant unemployment since 1992 to 1996, by sex

	Males	*Females*	*Total*
Great Britain	34	19	27

Earnings

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the number of people under the age of 25 years who earn less than *(a)* £2.50, *(b)* £3.00, *(c)* £3.50, *(d)* £4.00 and *(e)* £4.50 per hour; and if he will make a statement; [3084]

(2) if he will list the number of people, by gender, who earn less than *(a)* £2.50, *(b)* £3.00, *(c)* £3.50, *(d)* £4.00 and *(e)* £4.50 per hour; and if he will make a statement. [3085]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 13 November 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 21 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent questions on earnings distributions by hour and gender in Great Britain.

The latest information, from the Labour Force Survey, is shown in the table below.

Labour force survey, spring 1996—Great Britain

Number of employees earning less than:	*All aged under 25 years*	*All males*	*All females*
£2.50	439,000	354,000	549,000
£3.00	847,000	663,000	1,074,000
£3.50	1,306,000	1,095,000	2,135,000
£4.00	1,739,000	1,688,000	3,275,000
£4.50	2,176,000	2,410,000	435,000

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest estimates of the expenditure on external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [4065]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 14 November 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the letter that I have today sent in reply to the identical question that he tabled at the end of the 1995–96 Session. I have placed a copy of my letter in the Members' Library.

Income Statistics

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the *(a)* investment and *(b)* earned income in (i) 1979–80 and (ii) 1995–96 for each income decile group. [4471]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Dawn Primarolo, dated 21 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the investment income and the earned income in 1979–80 and 1995–96 for each income decile group.

The figures requested are shown in the attached table. The figures are derived from the analysis of the effects of taxes and benefits on household income which is based on the Family Expenditure Survey (FES). No figures are available for 1979–80 as the FES was on a calender year basis at that time. The latest information available is for the fiscal year 1994–95. The figures show the mean incomes at current prices for decile groups of households ranked by equivalised disposable income. The figures are not strictly comparable over time because of changes in classification of income and because of changes in the FES.

Investment income and earned income in 1979 and 1994–95 for each income decile group

	Bottom	*2nd*	*3rd*	*4th*	*5th*	*6th*	*7th*	*8th*	*9th*	*Top*
1979										
Earned income	350	700	1,650	3,100	4,340	5,200	6,210	7,390	8,090	10,830
Investment income	70	50	80	110	110	130	150	190	260	590
1994–95										
Earned income	1,060	1,840	3,070	5,640	9,160	13,620	17,810	21,540	26,480	44,250
Investment income	160	170	210	320	440	570	740	860	1,240	3,600

Average per household (£ per year, rounded to nearest £10).

Drug-resistant Infections (Mortality)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the mortality rates for *(a)* multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis, *(b)* methycillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus and *(c)* vancomycin-resistant enterococci. [4664]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 19 November 1996:]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 21 November 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on mortality rates for multi-drug resistant TB, MRSA, and vancomycin resistant enterococci.

Multi-drug resistant TB, and deaths due to MRSA or vancomycin resistant enterococci do not have distinct codes within the revision of the International Classification of Diseases used for encoding death registration data at the Office for National Statistics, and therefore there are no centrally held statistics on deaths from these causes.

WALES

Environmental Auditing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the ways in which his Department has *(a)* demonstrated by example and *(b)* promoted externally, the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing; and if he will make a statement. [4535]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Welsh Office aims to reduce the impact of its own activities on the environment and to improve the management of its own resources. Energy surveying and auditing is a well established feature of the Department's green housekeeping strategy. All Welsh Office properties have been surveyed and the resulting recommendations implemented. Improvements include draughtproofing and thermal insulation; modifications to air conditioning and heating controls; new energy efficient lighting and automatic lighting control systems.

The Welsh Office has also examined a wide range of its other domestic activity and resulting annual action plans have included measures to reduce environmental effects in the key areas of water conservation; waste management; greener vehicles; ozone-depleting substances; efficient paper use and through raising staff awareness.

As with other Departments, the Welsh Office ensures that its policies and programmes take proper account of environmental concerns in accordance with the 1990 Environment White Paper "This Common Inheritance" and "Sustainable Development: the UK Strategy" published in 1994. My right hon. Friend is the Department's green Minister and the Welsh Office is contributing to the booklet of case studies which green Ministers intend to publish in the new year showing good examples of environmental appraisal.

The Department published a booklet in September 1994 entitled "Selling to the Welsh Office – A Green Guide for suppliers of Goods and Services to the Welsh Office"

which is sent with all invitations to tender. Potential suppliers are asked what action they are taking to obtain BS7750.

The Welsh Office actively encourages environmental management and auditing more widely. It promotes the EC eco–management and audit scheme—EMAS—and the availability of grant aid for small companies under the SCEEMAS scheme. In March, my right hon. Friend launched the business and the environment campaign. The campaign aims to raise awareness of environmental issues and of the commercial advantages of good environmental management including the opportunities for financial savings; promote the increased take–up of environmental services; and encourage firms to undertake best practice in environmental management. As part of the campaign, the Welsh Office is working closely with Arena Network, a non-profit making organisation set up to raise business awareness and to provide advice to companies on environmental issues.

Arena now has around 300 Welsh member companies and, with Welsh Office support, is developing a portfolio of training activities and project work with local business groups. The Welsh Office is also collaborating with Arena, the environmental technology support unit, the environmental technology best practice programme and other organisations on the provision of environmental best practice seminars and workshops for business.

The Welsh Office also promotes improved efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing by supporting the River Dee waste minimisation project which involves 14 companies auditing their use of energy, water and materials and identifying ways of minimising waste generation. The project was launched in May 1995 and has already identified areas for substantial savings.

Head Teachers

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the current number of women who are head teachers in *(a)* the primary and *(b)* the secondary sectors; and if he will make a statement. [4936]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: There were 769 female head teachers in primary schools and 26 in secondary schools at January 1996 according to the results of the schools census.

Resource Accounting

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress his Department is making with the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting; and in respect of which financial year he expects to publish the first set of resource accounts. [4996]

Mr. Hague: The Welsh Office already has accruals accounting systems in place and is trialling the production of resource accounts at present. The Department, in common with others, is preparing to implement resource budgeting in time to form the basis for the year 2000 survey. As set out in Cm 2929, the first published resource accounts for the Department and all other Departments will be in respect of 1999–2000.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

West Midlands Serious Crimes Squad

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what have been the legal costs met from public purse in respect of claims for compensation for people whose convictions were obtained with the help of evidence from the west midlands serious crimes squad and which were subsequently quashed in the Court of Appeal *(a)* in total and *(b)* for each case. [4999]

Mr. Kirkhope: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available.

Resource Accounting

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what progress his Department is making with the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting; and in respect of which financial year he expects to publish the first set of resource accounts. [4979]

Mr. Streeter: My officials are working closely with the Treasury towards the introduction of resource accounting. Systems to provide the information necessary for resource accounting are being procured through the private finance initiative. We plan to award the contract in August 1997. Resource accounts will then be produced and audited for 1998–99. Subject to our, and the National Audit Office's, satisfaction the first published account will be for the financial year 1999–2000.

Environmental Auditing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the ways in which his Department has *(a)* demonstrated by example and *(b)* promoted externally, the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing; and if he will make a statement. [4536]

Mr. Streeter: My Department's areas of policy responsibility do not have major environmental impact. Environmental efficiency initiatives therefore concentrate on our impact as a consumer. The Department continues to improve energy efficiency. Both the Department and the Court Service have signed the declaration of corporate commitment to energy efficiency. There is an ongoing programme to maintain, and where appropriate upgrade, the historic buildings on our estate. The design of new court buildings takes full account of environmental concerns, particularly by requiring designs to obtain a "very good" marking under the Building Research Establishment environmental assessment method. Energy audits and environmental assessments have been commissioned for over 70 of our largest court buildings. The procurement of goods and services takes all reasonable steps to maximise the use of recycled and renewable resources.

The Department is now looking to develop initiatives in other areas of green housekeeping, particularly through a pilot waste audit as a first step to setting waste reduction targets by the end of this year, and investigating extending our sensitive waste collection contracts to increase recycling.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Lord Chancellor will respond to the recommendations made by Sir Richard Scott concerning inquiry procedures. [5827]

Mr. Streeter: In February this year the Lord Chancellor invited public comment on Sir Richard Scott's recommendations on public inquiry procedures. The Lord Chancellor was grateful for the 33 responses received, which were referred to the Council on Tribunals—the independent advisory body set up in 1958 following the Franks report on administrative tribunals and inquiries—by a reference in the following terms:

"To consider and advise on the procedural issues that arise in the conduct of public inquiries set up by Ministers to investigate particular matters of public concern, having regard to the recommendations made in Sir Richard Scott's report, and to the views on those recommendations that have since been expressed."

The council has now submitted its advice on the issues raised in respect of inquiry procedures in the Scott report and in the consultation. The Lord Chancellor was most grateful to the Council on Tribunals for this authoritative advice, which will be of considerable value when setting up inquiries. The advice is expressed in broad terms which enables general application, and therefore refers only briefly to other proceedings which might affect the procedural aspects of such inquiries, such as for example, coroners' inquests or, in Scotland, fatal accident inquiries.

Copies of the council's advice have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Additional copies will be available from my Department on request. The council's advice and the Lord Chancellor's statement today constitute the Government's response to Sir Richard Scott's recommendations about inquiry procedures.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Pistols

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many incidents have occurred since 1976 where pistols licensed only for target shooting have been used illegally. [4455]

Sir John Wheeler: The Chief Constable has now advised me that the information needed to answer this question is not readily available and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Higher Education

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the percentage change in spending per student in higher education between 1989-90 and 1995–96 in Northern Ireland. [4637]

Mr. Ancram: Spending per full-time equivalent student at Northern Ireland universities, based on constant prices and excluding student support, decreased by 18 per cent. between 1989–90 and 1994–95.

Spending per initial teacher training student at Northern Ireland colleges of education, based on constant prices, increased by 1.8 per cent. between 1989–90 and 1994–95.

Figures for 1995–96 are not yet available.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland remained in full-time education in each of the last five years. [4634]

Mr. Ancram: The percentage of 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland remaining in full-time education in each of the last five years is as follows:

1991: 69 per cent.

1992: 75 per cent.

1993: 79 per cent.

1994: 78 per cent.

1995: 76 per cent.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the percentage of post-16-year-olds in full-time education in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years. [5024]

Mr. Ancram: The information, which is available only for post-16-year-olds of working age—men 16 to 64 and women 16 to 59—is as follows:

	Post-16-year-olds in full-time education (Per cent.)
Spring 1987	6.5
Spring 1988	6.4
Spring 1989	7.1
Spring 1990	7.0
Spring 1991	7.6
Spring 1992	7.6
Spring 1993	7.7
Spring 1994	9.0
Spring 1995	9.2
Spring 1996	8.9

Source:
Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey, spring 1987–spring 1996.

Environmental Auditing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the ways in which his Department has *(a)* demonstrated by example and *(b)* promoted externally the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing; and if he will make a statement. [4529]

Mr. Ancram: All Northern Ireland Departments have produced green housekeeping action plans and the industrial research and technology unit of the Department of Economic Development has applied for accreditation BS 7750.

(a) The Department of Economic Development provides financial assistance to industry and commerce in Northern Ireland for environmental auditing and environmental management leading to the adoption of standards such as BS 7750 or ISO 14001 or participation in the EC eco-management and audit scheme EMAS.

(b) The Department also promotes the benefits of environmental auditing and consequential action through the publication of case study booklets and liaison with industry groups.

Manufacturing Industry

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage change there has been in Northern Ireland's manufacturing output between 1975 and 1995. [4633]

Mr. Ancram: Over the period 1975 to 1995 manufacturing output in Northern Ireland has increased by 28.3 per cent.

Vocational Qualifications

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of the Northern Ireland work force has no vocational qualifications. [4639]

Mr. Ancram: It is not possible to identify a definitive list of qualifications which are purely vocational as many—for example, higher and first degrees—come in both vocational and academic form. At winter 1995–96, the latest date for which figures are available, approximately 24 per cent. of the Northern Ireland work force had no formal qualifications of any kind.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of people work in Northern Ireland are in part-time employment; and of these, what percentage are *(a)* women, *(b)* men and *(c)* aged between 18 and 25 years. [5026]

Mr. Ancram: A total of 22 per cent. of people working in Northern Ireland are in part-time employment. Of these, 85 per cent. are women, 15 per cent. are men and 14 per cent. are aged between 18 and 25 years.

Qualifications

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people in Northern Ireland have no qualifications; and of these, how many are aged between 18 and 25 years. [5022]

Mr. Ancram: Information obtained from the spring 1996 labour force survey shows that there are approximately 299,000 people of working age in Northern Ireland with no formal qualifications. Of these almost 29,000 are between 18 and 25 years of age.

Unemployment

Mr. Worthington : To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many 18 to 25-year-old *(a)* men and *(b)* women in Northern Ireland have been unemployed for (i) more than six months and (ii) more than one year. [5028]

Mr. Ancram: The latest available information relates to 10 October 1996 and is as follows:

Claimants aged 18–24	*Men*	*Women*
Unemployed for six months or more	6,677	2,158
Unemployed for one year or more	4,261	1,285

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of the population of Northern Ireland who are without any qualifications are unemployed. [5023]

Mr. Ancram: Information obtained from the spring 1996 labour force survey shows that approximately 10 per cent. of the Northern Ireland population of working age who have no qualifications are unemployed—International Labour Organisation definition.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many 18 to 25-year-olds in Northern Ireland are *(a)* men and *(b)* women; and how many in, and what percentage of, each group are unemployed. [5029]

Mr. Ancram: The latest available information is as follows:

	Male	*Female*
(i) Number of 18 to 24-year-olds (1995 mid-year estimates)	91,223	83,998
(ii) Number of 18 to 24-year-olds unemployed on 10 October 1996	13,792	6,615
(iii) (ii) as a percentage of (i)	15.1 per cent.	7.9 per cent.

Resource Accounting

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress his Department is making with the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting; and in respect of which financial year he expects to publish the first set of resource accounts. [4989]

Sir John Wheeler: Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office continue to progress their plans for the implementation of the changes necessary to support the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting. The Departments are in the course of introducing systems which will enable resource accounts to be published and laid before Parliament for the year 1999–2000.

Grammar Schools

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what sums were spent on the preparatory departments of voluntary and other grammar schools in the most recent year of which figures are available; and for what purposes such money was provided. [4917]

Mr. Ancram: The most recent year for which figures are available is the 1995–96 financial year and the table details the sums spent:

	£
Voluntary grammar schools	1,316,162
Controlled grammar schools	172,060

Under the local management of schools formula funding arrangements, financial contributions to preparatory departments are restricted to 40 per cent. of the teaching costs. All other costs are met by parental contribution.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what activities of voluntary grammar schools are funded by the Department of Education through its funding formulae that are not funded by education and library boards in their funding formulae. [4918]

Mr. Ancram: The funding arrangements for voluntary grammar schools allow for all expenditure relating to maintenance and equipment to be delegated to schools whereas education and library boards handle some of the costs centrally for controlled and maintained schools. The voluntary grammar school arrangements also allow for the payment of VAT and some other costs such as insurance which do not arise in controlled and maintained schools.

Higher and Further Education

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many staff are employed and how much money is spent by the Department of Education in administering *(a)* higher education and *(b)* further education. [4919]

Mr. Ancram: I will write to the hon. Member.

Pupils

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pupils there are at *(a)* controlled and *(b)* maintained schools, at (i) primary and (ii) secondary level (1) currently, (2) in five and (3) in 10 years' time. [4920]

Mr. Ancram: Details of the enrolments for *(a)* controlled and *(b)* maintained schools at (i) primary and (ii) secondary level are as follows:

Enrolments 1995–96

	Controlled	*Maintained*
Primary	89,674	92,769
Secondary	55,289	49,199

Note:
Voluntary grammar schools are excluded.
School population projections are not available by school management type.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Resource Accounting

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress his Department is making with the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting; and in respect of which financial year he expects to publish the first set of resource accounts. [4991]

Mr. Willetts: The Cabinet Office will be introducing its resource accounting system on 1 April 1998. The Department, in common with others, is preparing to implement resource budgeting in time to form the basis for the year 2000 survey. As set out in Cm 2929, the first published resource accounts for the Department and all other departments will be in respect of 1999–2000.

Government Opportunities Report

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when the 1996 Government opportunities special report will be published. [5773]

Mr. Freeman: The 1996 Government opportunities special report is being published today. The report shows that opening up government activities to competition and private sector involvement under the competing for quality programme has led to savings to the taxpayer of over £700 million each year. A copy has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information is collated centrally on *(a)* the long-term revenue commitments and *(b)* any other commitments arising as a result of private finance initiative projects agreed by (i) his Department and (ii) agencies accountable to his Department. [5089]

Mr. Willetts *[holding answer 20 November 1996]:* The Government response to the Treasury Committee report on the private finance initiative agreed on the importance of collecting and monitoring information on future spending commitments arising from contracts under the private finance initiative. Such information is now being collected. The response stated that aggregate projections of the level of expenditure that is anticipated to arise from signed contracts under the initiative would be published in the 1997–98 Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Civil Service (Nationality Restrictions)

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what were the Government's objectives in introducing nationality restrictions on employment in the civil service in June 1996; [5248]

(2) if the Government will scrap the nationality bar and restore the rights of Irish and Commonwealth citizens in applying for civil service posts; [5249]

(3) what legal provisions govern the rights of Irish and Commonwealth citizens to apply for posts in the UK civil service. [5250]

Mr. Freeman: The changes announced in my written answer to the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) on 1 March 1996, *Official Report*, column *771*, took effect on 1 June 1996 and I have no plans to reverse them.

The legal provisions governing the rights of Irish and Commonwealth citizens to apply for posts in the UK civil service are as follows. The Aliens' Restriction (Amendment) Act 1919 prohibits the appointment of any alien.

"to any office or place in the Civil Service of the State".

Because of Great Britain's historic connections with Ireland and the Commonwealth, the definition of "alien" did not include British protected persons or the Irish, even when the Republic of Ireland left the Commonwealth in 1948. Civil service posts were accordingly open to Commonwealth nationals and citizens of the Republic of Ireland. Having regard to the conditions at the time of their enactment, the concept of "alien" in the 1919 Act included those who are now nationals of European Economic Area member states. Under the British Nationality Act 1981, an "alien" is

"a person who is neither a Community citizen nor a British protected person nor a citizen of the Republic of Ireland".

The June 1996 changes were made under the Minister's powers in the Civil Service Order in Council in order to protect the UK's right, which every other EEA member state has, to be able to reserve its core posts for its own nationals.

SCOTLAND

Government Borrowing Requirement

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the share for Scotland of the United Kingdom's general Government borrowing requirement for each year from 1979–80 to 1994–95 expressed in 1996–97 prices. [1365]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 31 October 1996]:* I have been asked to reply.

Approximate estimates of the general Government borrowing requirement for Scotland in 1993–94 and 1994–95 are published in the "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" annual report. Figures for the complete period back to 1979–80 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Firearms

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many offences involving the discharge of a firearm took place in each year in Scotland since 1966; [4351]

(2) how many offences involving the carrying of a firearm took place in each year in Scotland since 1966. [4352]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Detailed statistics on offences involving firearms in Scotland have been collected since 1978. The following table provides the available information:

Offences involving firearms, Scotland, 1978–95

	Number of offences in which a firearm was alleged to have been used	*Number of offences in which a firearm was alleged to have been fired*
1978	492	388
1979	682	564
1980	1,093	939
1981	1,314	1,150
1982	1,283	1,058
1983	1,336	1,081
1984	1,353	1,110
1985	1,675	1,352
1986	1,525	1,189
1987	1,429	1,084
1988	1,159	843
1989	1,479	1,001
1990	1,495	1,072
1991	1,921	1,191
1992	1,959	1,170
1993	1,773	1,057
1994	1,788	1,052
1995	1,715	1,219

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many handgun licences have been registered in each year in Scotland since 1966; [4353]

(2) how many handgun licences are currently registered in Scotland. [4354]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the number of firearms certificates on issue allowing the holder to possess a handgun is not routinely collected by the Scottish Office. Individual certificates are administered by police forces. Although annual statistical returns are made, there is no routine collection of the number of firearms certificates which allow the holder to possess a handgun. A special exercise was, however, conducted recently which showed that, at the beginning of 1996, approximately 3,230 firearms certificates current in Scotland allowed the holder to possess a handgun.

Further information on this matter is available at annexe A, table 7, of the Government's submission to Lord Cullen's inquiry into the shootings at Dunblane primary school, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Fisheries Assistance

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many applications he has received since 1 July 1994 for financial assistance under the financial instrument for fisheries guidance from *(a)* Orkney and *(b)* Shetland; how many have been approved; and what is their grant value. [4847]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Since 1 July 1994, the Scottish Office has received 18 applications from Orkney, of which 13 were awarded grant aid totalling £1.173 million, and 37 applications from Shetland, of which 13 were awarded a total of £0.987 million.

Four applications from Orkney and eight from Shetland are currently being considered for grant in the next round of awards.

Resource Accounting

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress *(a)* his and *(b)* the Lord Advocate's Department is making with the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting; and, in each case, in respect of which financial year he expects to publish the first set of resource accounts. [4997]

Mr. James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office commissioned a new accounting system on 1 April 1996 capable of handling accruals accounting. Good progress is being made on introducing accounting for fixed assets, and on attaching expenditure to objectives, as required by schedule 5 to the proposed accounts, and the Scottish Office will be introducing its resource accounting system during 1997–98.

The Lord Advocate's Department, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, will be introducing its resource accounting system in April 1998.

Both Departments in common with others, are preparing to implement resource budgeting in time to form the basis for the year 2000 survey. As set out in Cm 2929 the first published resource accounts for the Departments and all other Departments will be in respect of 1999–2000.

Population Statistics

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 17 October, *Official Report*, column *1142*, when he will supply the information requested. [5658]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I wrote to the hon. Member on Tuesday 19 November 1996.

European Structural Fund

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much European structural fund assistance has recently been awarded to the Dumfries and Galloway objective 5b area; and if he will make a statement. [5717]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am pleased to announce that on 14 November, I approved a further £5 million of European funding to 54 projects in the Dumfries and Galloway 5b area.

In total, some £25 million of the available funds have now been committed to projects in the area, which are targeted at promoting economic development. This will be matched by funding from local project sponsors and will deliver over £50 million worth of investment.

Scottish Environment Protection Agency

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends formally to issue the guidance that he is required to give to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency under section 31 of the Environment Act 1995. [5718]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A draft of the guidance which I am required under section 31 of the Environment Act 1995 to give to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency on its objectives, including the contribution it is to make towards the achievement of sustainable development, has been laid before the House for the required period of 40 sitting days. This guidance is being issued to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency today.

I am also formally issuing to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency a management statement which summarises Ministers' aims and objectives for the agency, its duties, powers and responsibilities, and its relationship with Ministers, Government Departments and other bodies.

An explanatory document which restates the principles of sustainable development, provides non statutory guidance on particular functions and offers a commentary on the agency's duty to take account of likely costs and benefits is also being provided to the agency.

Copies of these documents are being placed in the Library.

Forestry Commission Land

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how much money the Forestry Commission *(a)* received from the sale of land and *(b)* spent on acquiring land in each financial year since 1980–81; and how much it is forecast to (i) receive and (ii) spend on the sale and acquisition of land in the current financial year; [2893]

(2) how many hectares of land were *(a)* bought and *(b)* sold by the Forestry Commission in each financial year since 1980–81; and how many are forecast to be (i) bought and (ii) sold for each region in Scotland and county in England and Wales in the current financial year. [2894]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 13 November 1996]:* The subjects of the questions relate to matters undertaken by Forest Enterprise. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. Gordon Cowie, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Gordon M. Cowie to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 21 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Scotland has asked me to reply to your Questions about Forestry Commission acquisitions and disposals.

I enclose at Annex A a list of disposal receipts for the sale of all types of Forestry Commission land and properties since 1981, including the forecast for 1996–97.

I enclose at Annex B a list of the total monies spent on acquiring land and other interests from 1 April 1986 to 31 March 1996, together with the forecast for 1996–97. We only hold information on the total amount of money spent on the acquisition of land and other interests for the financial years 1986–87 onwards.

I enclose at Annex C a list of the area of land acquired by the Forestry Commission each year since 1980–81. Annex D gives a similar list of the Commission's disposals.

The Commission plans to sell 14,000 hectares of forest land in Britain in the current financial year. The proportion of this that will be sold in each region in Scotland and county in England and Wales will depend on the state of the market, particularly the demand for forest land in different parts of Britain.

Acquisitions of land are to a large measure opportunistic, depending on the market, and again a forecast for each region or county is not possible.

Annex A: Sales of Forestry Commission properties (including woodland areas) by year: £ million

Year ended 31 March	*Total receipts (£ million)*
1981	4.5
1982	6.9
1983	14.6
1984	23.6
1985	22.1
1986	17.0
1987	14.7
1988	13.1
1989	12.4
1990	13.0
1991	12.0
1992	14.5
1993	9.9
1994	17.4
1995	12.1
1996	14.6
1997	[1]20.0

[1] Forecast.

Annex B: Forestry Commission acquisitions of land and other interests by year: £

Year ended 31 March	*£*
1987	1,392,890
1988	1,101,895
1989	898,225
1990	161,001
1991	1,616,390
1992	1,123,541
1993	494,033
1994	493,901
1995	210,001
1996	111,371
1997	[1]200,000

[1] Forecast.

Annex C: Forestry Commission acquisitions of land by year: hectares

Year ended 31 March	Hectares
1981	2,031
1982	5,064
1983	4,432
1984	2,870
1985	902
1986	1,189
1987	3,697
1988	1,718
1989	2,312
1990	505
1991	2,970
1992	1,920
1993	333
1994	379
1995	486
1996	29

Annex D: Sales of Forestry Commission properties (including woodland areas) by year: hectares

Year ended 31 March	All land (hectares)	Forestry land (hectares)
1981	2,240	688
1982	10,423	2,347
1983	12,108	6,632
1984	44,570	16,507
1985	28,857	16.072
1986	16,573	8,314
1987	10, 956	6,186
1988	8,929	6,387
1989	7,675	4,328
1990	7,851	5,559
1991	7,428	4,770
1992	6,911	6,263
1993	10,589	6,827
1994	14,950	14,419
1995	10,808	10,014
1996	9,088	8,217

Beaufort's Dyke (Munitions Dumping)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when Ministers received the initial report of the second survey by the marine laboratory in Aberdeen on the munitions and other materials dumped in the vicinity of Beaufort's Dyke; for what reasons the proposed date of publication of late September has not been adhered to; when the report will be published; what arrangements he has made for (i) publishing the report and (ii) meeting with interested hon. Members to discuss its content and follow up; and if he will make a statement. [4437]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 18 November 1996]:* My right hon. Friend has yet to receive the report of the second survey of Beaufort's Dyke by the marine laboratory in Aberdeen. Analysis of the large volumes of data collected during the survey is continuing. It is expected that the report will be published before the end of November and copies will be sent to interested hon. Members on the date of publication. This adheres to the timetable envisaged.

My noble Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and the Environment has already agreed to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss the report once it is published.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information is collated centrally on *(a)* the long-term revenue commitments and *(b)* any other commitments arising as a result of private finance initiative projects agreed by (i) his Department and (ii) agencies accountable to his Department. [5078]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 20 November 1996]:* The Government response to the Treasury Select Committee report on the private finance initiative agreed the importance of collecting and monitoring information on future spending commitments arising from contracts under the private finance initiative. Such information is now being collected. The response stated that aggregate projections of the level of expenditure that is anticipated to rise from signed contracts under the initiative would be published in the 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report".

Kilwinning Plant Closure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions have taken place between his Department and *(a)* Robert Wilson and Sons Ltd. and *(b)* Hillsdown Ambient Foods Group Ltd. relating to the closure of their Kilwinning plant. [5045]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 20 November 1996]:* Following the announcement by Hillsdown Holdings of its proposal to close its subsidiary Robert Wilson and Sons at Kilwinning, my officials contacted Robert Wilson and Sons to discuss the implications of this decision and the scope for providing assistance towards a project to retain production at Kilwinning. Officials from Enterprise Ayrshire were also closely in touch with local management over this period. However, discussions with the company and its parent company quickly revealed that there was no prospect of the closure decision being reversed. Enterprise Ayrshire has since concentrated its efforts on making available to those affected by the announcement its full range of counselling and training services.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next proposes to visit the Robert Wilsons and Sons Ltd. factory in Kilwinning. [5047]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 20 November 1996]:* My right hon. Friend has no plans to visit this company.

Factory Closures (North Ayrshire)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what additional measures he intends to introduce to mitigate the impact of the closure of factories during the last 12 months within the north Ayrshire area. [5049]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 20 November 1996]:* My right hon. Friend has no plans to introduce additional measures, since our existing policies are working successfully. These policies place responsibility for economic regeneration primarily with the local enterprise companies, in this case Enterprise Ayrshire. The measures necessary to address the economic impact of factory closures are among those considered closely by Scottish Enterprise when allocating enterprise company budgets. Enterprise Ayrshire and its partners are currently involved in a wide range of projects designed to stimulate the

economy of North Ayrshire and improve the competitiveness of its companies. In addition, Irvine travel-to-work area, covering most of North Ayrshire, continues to benefit from development area status.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

International Planned Parenthood Federation

Mr. Clifton Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will continue to extend financial support to the International Planned Parenthood Federation, with special reference to its work in China; and if he will make a statement. [5376]

Dr. Liam Fox: We recognise that the International Planned Parenthood Federation does valuable work throughout the world to promote reproductive health and provide effective assistance to family planning associations. We shall continue to provide financial support to IPPF from the overseas development programme, subject to the availability of resources and remaining satisfied with the value for money from our investments.

The China Family Planning Association is one of the many affiliates with which IPPF works and we have been keen to know more about the difference that IPPF and CFPA have been able to make to reproductive choice in China. The Overseas Development Administration therefore recently commissioned a review of the role of IPPF in China and its work with the CFPA. A copy of the consultants' report has been placed in the Library.

We regard this examination, led on ODA's behalf by a highly respected and authoritative expert in the population field, as an informed, balanced and realistic assessment. It concludes that IPPF has been able to play an effective and valuable role in influencing CFPA in the development of the kind of activities and role that we would expect of a non-governmental organisation. However, we should recognise that there is still clearly a long way to go.

We accept the review's conclusion that the influence of IPPF has been a force for positive change, and that the continued involvement of IPPF in China will be beneficial in helping CFPA further. These conclusions support our long-held view that it is better that organisations such as IPPF should be engaged and working to influence from within, and is the course that we believe most likely to produce the outcomes that we all seek. We shall expect IPPF to continue its efforts in this regard and be able to better demonstrate the difference it makes. We will maintain a close interest in its future work in China.

We do not envisage changing the general principle of the present funding arrangements under which our annual core grant is provided to support the work of IPPF throughout the world, and is not usually designated for use in particular countries. Exceptions to this principle will concern only those countries where we have bilateral programmes in reproductive health, which does not include China.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Agency Letters

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions *(a)* non-departmental public bodies and *(b)* executive agencies responsible to his Department, have provided answers by letter, copied to the Library but not published in the *Official Report* in each of the last two years. [3157]

Mr. Lang: Records of the number of such answers are not readily available.

When appropriate, Ministers ask non-departmental public bodies to reply directly by letter to Members and these requests are recorded in the answer given to Members which is published in the *Official Report*. There are currently no arrangements either to copy the letters to the Library of the House or to publish them in the *Official Report*.

However, when Members ask questions relating to the day to day operations of my Department's executive agencies, the Minister will ask the chief executive to respond and in all instances copies of the letters will be published in the *Official Report* underneath the Minister's answer.

Dounreay Nuclear Power Station

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the statements by Mr. Gay Mitchell, President in Office for the Council of Ministers at the Council question time in the European Parliament on 13 November in respect of an environmental audit of Dounreay. [5003]

Mr. Page: The President in Office of the Council of Ministers appears to share my view about the overriding importance of the health and safety of workers and the general public. Because safety is paramount Dounreay is subject to rigorous independent regulation by Her Majesty's nuclear installations inspectorate and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency: consequently, there is no need for the Commission to undertake an environmental audit, and it has no powers to do so.

Coal Mining Industry

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will ask the chairman of the British Coal Corporation to reply to the letters of 15 August and 9 October from the hon. Member for Normanton. [4787]

Mr. Page: I understand that the chairman of British Coal replied to the hon. Member yesterday.

Coal Imports

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which countries are the main exporters of coal to the United Kingdom; and how much each exported to the United Kingdom in the most recent year for which statistics are available. [5183]

Mr. Page: Imports of coal into the United Kingdom in 1995 were from the following countries:

	Thousand tonnes
United States of America	4,858
Australia	3,641
Colombia	2,687
Canada	1,364
Republic of South Africa	1,313
Poland	1,274
European Union[1]	283
Russia	160
Vietnam	101
People's Republic of China	77
Norway	2
Other countries	136
Total	15,896

Note:
[1] Includes extra EU coal routed through the Netherlands.
Source:
HM Customs and Excise figures from the Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 1996.

Industrial Tribunals (Race Relations Experts)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy in respect of industrial tribunals to ensure that at least one member with special knowledge or experience of race relations in the employment field should sit on a tribunal in a case of alleged race discrimination; and on what grounds. [5362]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The selection of members of individual tribunals is a matter for the presidents of the industrial tribunals and their regional chairmen. However in accordance with the declaration of intent given by Lord Jacques in the House of Lords on 15 October 1976, *Official Report*, columns *725–26*, during the passage of the Race Relations Bill the Presidents have made administrative arrangements so that wherever possible a member who has special knowledge or experience of race relations in the employment field will sit on tribunals hearing cases where racial discrimination is alleged by the applicant from the outset.

Liquidators

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps are in place to ensure there is transparency concerning liquidators' fees and expenses. [5457]

Mr. John M. Taylor: In any liquidation of an insolvent company the creditors acting through a liquidation committee or in general meeting may determine the level of remuneration to be paid to the liquidator. In order to be able to make an informed judgment concerning a liquidator's remuneration creditors need information as to the conduct and progress of the proceedings and insolvency practitioners therefore have an obligation to ensure that creditors are provided with such information. In this regard I was pleased to note the issue of statement of insolvency practice No. 9 by the Society of Practitioners of Insolvency which dealt with this issue and urged on the profession the maximum transparency in and about the setting of fees. That guidance has been adopted by the recognised professional bodies and is therefore now a standard against which future professional conduct can be measured.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the fees and expenses of Deloitte and Touche in the English liquidation of BCCI to date. [5456]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The totals of the UK liquidator's remuneration and expenses in the period to 15 January 1996, the date to which the liquidators last annual report was made up, were respectively US$203.6 million and US$6 million.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the current estimates in terms of timing and percentage amounts of dividend payments for BCCI creditors; what is the current estimate of the aggregate total of dividends to BCCI creditors which will be paid; and by when they are expected to have been paid. [5451]

Mr. Taylor: The liquidators plan to pay a dividend of 24.5 per cent. on 10 December 1996. They hope to pay a further substantial dividend in 1997.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the value of expenditure authorised by him on request from the liquidators of BCCI before the election of the creditors committee. [5297]

Mr. Taylor: In a winding up by the court there is initially no liquidation committee; section 141(5) of the Insolvency Act 1986 provides that the functions of the committee are vested in the Secretary of State. These functions relate principally to the granting of sanction to the liquidators to compromise debts, to bring or defend legal proceedings on behalf of the company and to carry on its business so far as may be necessary for the beneficial winding up of the company's affairs.

In the period prior to the formal establishment of the liquidation committee—that is, between 14 January, the date of the winding-up order made against BCCI (SA), and June 1993—sanction to commence legal proceedings was given in 1,388 cases, including 933 cases in which proceedings were to be issued against credit card debtors. In addition to those sanctions in respect of legal proceedings, numerous compromises of debts due to the company were also sanctioned.

Where the liquidators invited the Secretary of State to grant such sanctions, the matters had previously been referred to and approved by the informal creditors committee which existed at that time unless the amounts involved were lower than the de minimis level set by the informal creditors committee. The extent of the expenditure involved in the bringing of the sanctioned legal proceedings could only be calculated at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the procedure for the proper regulation and monitoring of costs in the English liquidation of BCCI. [5455]

Mr. Taylor: These are matters which the liquidation committee appointed by the creditors consider on a regular basis. Where any person is aggrieved by any act or decision of the liquidator they may apply to the court.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last met the liquidators of BCCI. [5296]

Mr. Taylor: My officials last met the UK joint liquidators of BCCI (SA) on 6 September 1996.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the costs of the English BCCI liquidation to date. [5454]

Mr. Taylor: Payments out of the UK liquidation in the period to 15 January 1996, the date to which the liquidators last annual report was made up, totalled US $491.5 million.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what are the worldwide assets of the BCCI companies, excluding those countries which have ring-fenced their assets; what proportion of the assets is available for distribution to creditors; and what factors have led to the remaining assets being unavailable for distribution. [5450]

(2) what is the aggregate amount for which proofs of debt have been received worldwide, excluding duplicate proofs of debt and proof of debts submitted in countries which have ring-fenced; and what proportion of the amount is disputed; [5449]

(3) what are the global costs of Deloitte and Touche's fees in respect of the BCCI liquidation to date; [5453]

(4) what are the total worldwide liabilities of the BCCI companies, excluding those countries which have ring-fenced their assets; [5448]

(5) what are the global costs of the BCCI liquidation to date. [5452]

Mr. Taylor: These are matters for the liquidators in the various jurisdictions.

Textiles

Mr. Rooney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which countries are proposing to amend the list of textiles and clothing products currently not integrated into the normal GATT 1994 rules. [5472]

Mr. Nelson: Stage 2 of the agreed four-stage phase-out of the multi-fibre arrangement requires that on 1 January 1998, all members of the World Trade Organisation which maintain restrictions on textile and clothing imports should reintegrate into the rules of GATT 1994 products accounting for not less than 17 per cent. of each member's imports in 1990.

Multi-fibre Agreement

Mr. Rooney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will list the organisations he has consulted on the proposed stage 2 phase out of the multi-fibre agreement; [5446]

(2) how many responses he has received to the consultation on the proposed stage 2 of the phase-out of the multi-fibre agreement; and of these how many were in favour. [5471]

Mr. Nelson: In preparation for assessing the Commission's proposals about how the EU should implement stage 2 of the phase-out of the multi-fibre arrangement on 1 January 1998, my Department consulted the following organisations:

Association of Independent Stores Ltd.
British Apparel and Textiles Confederation[2]
British Importers Confederation[1]
British Polyolefin Textiles Association[2]
British Retail Consortium[1]
Burton Group plc
Confederation of British Industry
Coopers and Lybrand
Dewhirst plc
Institute of Directors
International Textiles and Clothing Bureau[1]
Littlewoods plc
Local Action on Textiles and Clothing
Marks and Spencer plc
National Consumer Council
Orbis Services
Oxfam
Scottish Cashmere Association[2]
Sears plc[1]
Trades Union Congress
World Development Movement[1]

None of these organisations questioned the obligation to implement stage 2. As to whether stage 2 should include liberalisation of any products under quota, those marked[1] in the list were in favour and those marked[2] were opposed. The remainder expressed no view.

Resource Accounting

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress his Department is making with the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting; and in respect of which financial year he expects to publish the first set of resource accounts. [4993]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The DTI is on track to introduce resource accounting and budgeting in accordance with the timescales set out in the Government White Paper, "Better Accounting for the Taxpayer's Money," Cm 2929. Resource accounting systems will be introduced during the year beginning 1 April 1997 and the first set of resource accounts are planned for publication for the financial year beginning 1 April 1999.

The first survey on a resource basis is planned to be undertaken in the year 2000.

Hawk Aircraft (Indonesia)

Mr. Waller: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the next phase of British Aerospace's contract to supply Hawk aircraft to Indonesia. [5830]

Mr. Lang: I have authorised the issue of licences to British Aerospace for the export of 16 Hawk aircraft, and associated equipment, to Indonesia. This export represents the second consignment of Hawk aircraft in respect of the contract signed in 1993. Authorisation of the first consignment was announced in my answer of 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1081* to my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Sir A. Haselhurst).

Consumer Credit Deregulation

Mr. Waterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on consumer credit deregulation. [5719]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I am pleased to be able to report progress with deregulation in this area. The Government take the view that consumer credit law provides valuable and necessary protection. However, some aspects of the law can be changed to reduce the burden of regulation on business without detriment to the interests of consumers.

Last year we consulted on five proposals. Careful consideration of the replies we received has informed our decisions.

We have decided that we should revoke the existing regulations on quotations. Few consumers appear to ask for written quotations and the compliance cost to business is disproportionate to the benefit.

We shall reduce the burden on holders of standards consumer credit licences by limiting the circumstances in which they have to notify the Director General of Fair Trading of changes among their office holders or controllers.

We shall restore the value of consumer protection by making changes to the monetary amounts and limits in the Consumer Credit Act.

However, in the light of the response to the consultation, we shall not change the early settlement rebate regulations.

We are to undertake a further short consultation on our proposal to deregulate lending and hiring to unincorporated businesses. We wish to ascertain more clearly the deregulatory benefits and any consumer costs which may be expected if the borrower or hirer makes a deregulated credit or hire agreement either "wholly", or "wholly or predominantly" for business purposes.

We expect to put draft legislative proposals before Parliament during the next few months.

Finally, we shall in the next few months bring forward further deregulation proposals in the consumer credit sector.

EU Internal Market

Mr. Waterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what decisions were taken at the EU Ministerial Council on the internal market on 25 October; and what matters were voted upon. [5716]

Mr. Lang: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade represented the UK at the Internal Market Council In Luxembourg on 25 October.

The Council adopted a resolution on the simplification and rationalisation of the Community's customs regulations and procedures. The Council also adopted a Council decision on negotiations with Norway on customs co-operation—Spain opposed.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information is collated centrally on *(a)* the long-term revenue commitments and *(b)* any other commitments arising as a result of private finance initiative projects agreed by (i) his Department and (ii) agencies accountable to his Department. [5076]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 20 November 1996]:* My Department maintains a central record of all potential long-term revenue commitments arising from planned PFI projects in DTI and its agencies. However, no projects have yet been finally agreed—that is, contracts signed. No other commitments are envisaged, but if they were to emerge, a central record would be kept.

Kilwinning Plant Closure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its non-departmental public bodies have had with Hillsdown Ambient Foods Group Ltd. in relation to the relocation of production facilities from their Robert Wilson and Sons Ltd. factor in Kilwinning to North Walsham; and what financial help has been offered to the company to assist in the relocation. [5056]

Mr. Greg Knight *[holding answer 20 November 1996]:* It is not policy to disclose details of discussions of this kind which are commercial in confidence.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Students

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time students have entered the further education sector (i) nationally and (ii) in the west midlands in each year since 1992; and what was each figure as a percentage change on the previous year. [4900]

Mr. Paice: Table 1 shows the numbers of full-time and part-time further education students in each November from 1992 to 1995. The figures for 1995 are not on the same basis as those for earlier years, as explained in the footnotes to the table.

Table 2 shows the percentage changes in student numbers over the previous year, taking account as far as possible of the definitional differences between 1994 and 1995.

The November 1995 student number figures for England are provisional; estimates for west midlands are not yet available.

Table 1: Number of students (thousands)

	England			West Midlands		
	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Total*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Total*
November						
1992	592	1,263	1,855	37	72	109
1993	646	1,283	1,929	43	73	116
1994	677	1,362	2,039	48	82	130
1995	730	1,558	2,288	n/a	n/a	n/a

Figures are on the following bases: 1992 to 1994: Students on FE courses in FE and HE institutions (including sixth-form colleges). Split between full and part–time based on the position in November. 1995: All students in FE sector colleges (other than specialist designated institutions). Split between full and part–time based on attendance over the academic year as a whole.

[1] Provisional.

Table 2: Percentage change from the previous year

	England			West Midlands		
	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Total*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Total*
November						
1992	7	–6	–2	6	–8	–3
1993	9	2	4	16	1	6
1994	5	6	6	10	13	12
1995[1]	9	8	8	n/a	n/a	n/a

The percentage changes in 1995 take account as far as possible of the definitional differences from 1994 noted above.

[1] Provisional.

Lecturers

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what was the average salary of *(a)* a full-time and *(b)* a part-time lecturer in (i) the further and (ii) the higher education sector in 1979; [4964]

(2) what was the average salary of *(a)* a full-time and *(b)* a part-time lecturer in the higher education sector in each year since 1992; and what was the percentage change on the previous year; [4969]

(3) what was the average salary of *(a)* a full-time and *(b)* a part-time lecturer in the further education sector in each year since 1992; and what was the percentage change on the previous year. [4970]

Mr. Paice: Comprehensive information on the salaries of part-time further and higher education lecturers is not available. Information for full-time lecturers is shown in the table, although, as explained in the footnotes, the figures are not on exactly the same basis for all years.

All of the figures are derived from the "New Earnings Survey", based on a random 1 per cent. sample of employees, and so are subject to sampling variation. Precise significance should not therefore be attached to small year to year changes in the estimated averages.

Moreover year on year changes in the estimated averages are not necessarily a direct reflection of changes in pay rates, but would also be affected by changes over time in the composition of the lecturer populations.

	Average gross weekly pay[1] of full-time lecturers in:			
	FE colleges and colleges of HE		*Universities and polytechnics*	
	£	*Percentage change from previous year*	£	*Percentage change from previous year*
April				
1979[2,3]	103		149	
1992[3]	424	+7	504	+8
1993	453	[3]+7	526	+4
1994	448	–1	540	+3
1995	449	0	556	+3
1996	452	+1	551	–1

[1] All figures are derived from the "New Earnings Survey", based on a 1 per cent. random sample of employees. They relate to the average gross weekly pay, including overtime and additions, of full-time employees whose pay was not affected by absence. The timing of the NES data collection may mean however that the figures do not always take account of backdated pay awards.

[2] The figures for 1979 are on a different basis from those for later years: they relate to males only; polytechnic lecturers are included with lecturers in FE colleges and colleges of HE (rather than with university lecturers).

[3] Lecturers in FE colleges and colleges of HE exclude lecturers in sixth form colleges in 1979 and 1992, but include them in subsequent years. This difference in coverage may have affected the estimated percentage change in 1993 for this group.

Disturbed Children

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidelines she issues in respect of *(a)* expulsions from schools, *(b)* the need to take into account mitigating circumstances and *(c)* the need to provide counselling to disturbed children where appropriate; and if she will make a statement. [5435]

Mr. Forth: Guidance was issued by the Department in May 1994 to heads, governing bodies and local education authorities on the proper use of exclusion. This sets out what factors should be taken into account when considering exclusion. Further guidance on exclusions will need to be issued in due course, in the light of legislation currently before Parliament.

Guidance was also issued in May 1994 jointly with the Department of Health to LEAs and schools on good practice in the education of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. This reflected the variety of programmes and approaches which may help such children. Counselling may be a valuable approach in some cases.

School Exclusions

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the number of school exclusions in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* London in (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1990–91 and (iii) 1995–96; and what proportion of the school roll these figures represent. [5278]

Mr. Forth: No data on exclusions from school were collected nationally before 1990–91. Between April 1990 and April 1991, 2,910 pupils were reported to have been permanently excluded from schools in England; this represented 0.04 per cent. of the total school population.

The Department will be collecting comprehensive figures for permanent exclusions in the school year 1995–96 as part of the annual schools census in January. These figures will be available later in 1997.

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what information she has collated on the number of permanent exclusions from school and on the characteristics of the pupils excluded, in the most recent year for which data are available. [5721]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Information on permanent exclusions from LEA maintained and grant-maintained schools is now collected as part of the annual schools census. Data collected this year on exclusions in the 1994–95 school year are summarised in the following tables:

DfEE exclusions census: school year 1994–95

A. Permanent exclusions 1994–95[1] by type of school[2]

	Excluded pupils	
	Number	*As percentage of school population*
Primary		
LEA	1,331	0.03
GM	34	0.03

DfEE exclusions census: school year 1994–95

A. Permanent exclusions 1994–95 [1] by type of school [2]

	Excluded pupils	
	Number	*As percentage of school population*
Secondary		
LEA	7,605	0.31
GM	1,592	0.29
Special	522	0.54
All schools	11,084	0.15

[1] Data grossed-up from returns from 99.3 per cent. of LEA maintained and grant-maintained schools and non maintained special schools.
[2] Primary and secondary school data include middle schools as deemed.

B. Permanent exclusions 1994–95 [1 2] by gender

	Excluded pupils	
	Number	*As percentage of school population*
Primary		
Boys	1,209	0.05
Girls	92	—
Secondary		
Boys	7,191	0.48
Girls	1,663	0.11
Special		
Boys	449	0.69
Girls	44	0.13

[1] Data as reported—i.e. omitting exclusions where relevant information missing from returns.
[2] Primary and secondary school data include middle schools as deemed.

C. Permanent exclusions 1994–95 [1 2] by school

	Number of schools		
Number of pupils excluded	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Special*
0	17,315	1,060	950
1–2	1,110	1,133	241
3–4	22	606	39
5–6	2	357	9
7–8	0	168	3
9–10	0	82	0
11–15	0	69	0
16+	0	22	0

[1] Data as reported—i.e. omitting exclusions where relevant information missing from returns.
[2] Primary and secondary school data include middle school as deemed.

D. Permanent exclusions 1994–95[1] by age[2], ethnicity[3] and special educational needs

	Number excluded	*Percentage of excluded pupils*	*Percentage of school population*
Pupils aged			
4	29	0.3	8.2
5	88	0.8	8.6
6	118	1.1	8.7
7	153	1.4	8.4
8	228	2.1	8.2
9	317	3.0	8.1
10	390	3.7	7.8
11	661	6.2	7.7
12	1,191	11.2	7.6
13	2,083	19.6	7.7
14	3,040	28.6	7.8
15	2,112	19.9	7.4
16	203	1.9	2.2
17	18	0.2	1.5
18	6	0.1	0.2
White	8,785	83.8	89.8
Black Caribbean	769	7.3	1.1
Black African	148	1.4	0.6
Black Other	182	1.7	0.8
Indian	98	0.9	2.7
Pakistani	208	2.0	2.1
Bangladeshi	46	2.4	0.8
Chinese	11	0.1	0.4
Other Ethnic Group	241	2.3	1.5
With SEN statements	1,764	17.6	2.8
Without SEN statements	8,257	82.4	97.2

[1] Data as reported—i.e. omitting exclusions where relevant information missing from returns.
[2] Age as at 31 August 1994.
[3] Ethnic groups as percentage of school population—data covers five to 15-year-olds derived from 1991 national census.

Former Pupil (Ridings School)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she proposes to take to provide counselling and education for the child whose name has been supplied to her, formerly of Ridings school. [5436]

Mr. Forth: None. These are matters for Calderdale local education authority.

GCSE

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for 1996 the percentage of 15-year-old pupils in total and by gender of the maintained sector of each local education authority (1) entered for GCSE in *(a)* English language, *(b)* mathematics, *(c)* science, *(d)* English language and mathematics together and *(e)* English language and mathematics and science together and (2) achieving (i) at least grade G in each, and (ii) at least grade C in each, and in each case their average point score. [3642]

Mrs. Gillan: This information for 1996 is not yet available.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will list the percentage of 15-year-old pupils of the maintained sector of each local education authority entered for GCSE in *(a)* English language, *(b)* mathematics, *(c)* science, *(d)* English language and mathematics together, and *(e)* English language and mathematics and science in total and by gender in (i) 1992 and (ii) 1995; and what were the percentage point changes in each case between 1992 and 1995; [3643]

(2) if she will list for *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1995 the percentage of 15-year-old pupils in total and by gender of the maintained sector of each local education authority (1) entered for GCSE in (i) science, and (ii) English language and mathematics and science together, and (2) achieving *(A)* at least grade G in each, *(B)* at least grade C in each, and in each case their average point score. [3641]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is set out in a number of tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Resource Accounting

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress her Department is making with the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting; and in respect of which financial year she expects to publish the first set of resource accounts. [4984]

Mr. Robin Squire: DfEE will be introducing its resource accounting system from 1 April 1997. The Department, in common with others, is preparing to implement resource budgeting in time to form the basis for the 2000 survey. As set out in Cm 2929, the first published resource accounts for the Department and all other Departments will be in respect of 1999–2000.

Free School Transport

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what powers she has to intervene in respect of the provision of free school transport. [5150]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend has limited powers under sections 496 and 497 of the Education Act 1996. She could intervene only if she were satisfied that a local education authority had failed to fulfil a statutory duty or had acted unreasonably, in the very strict sense in which the courts have interpreted that term, and that her intervention would be expedient.

Clinical Academics

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will provide the necessary funding to ensure that clinical academics maintain a pay parity with NHS doctors of equivalent grade. [5292]

Mr. Forth: It is for universities and colleges to set pay levels for academics and other staff.

Women

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to measure and evaluate the effect of her Department's policies on women. [5491]

Mrs. Gillan: In July of this year, the model guidance on policy appraisal for equal treatment was revised and circulated at Cabinet level for Departments to adapt to their own circumstances. A copy was placed in the Library. This guidance requires officials to identify policy issues which might impact differently on women and men, and other groups, to assess whether this is justified in policy terms, and to adjust the policy if it is not. Advice based on that model has been issued to all senior officials in the Department accompanied by a supportive personal message from the permanent secretary.

The recent Government report, "One Year On" outlines action taken by Government to benefit women since the world conference on women, and also includes baseline statistics against which future progress can be measured.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many appeals there have been to the CSA in *(a)* the west midlands and *(b)* England in the last year; and of these how many led to a change in the maintenance demanded from parents in (i) the west midlands and (ii) England; [4372]

(2) how long is the average delay between a successful appeal to the CSA and the correction in the maintenance payments in *(a)* the west midlands and *(b)* England; [4373]

(3) how many cases the CSA dealt with over the last year in *(a)* the west midlands and *(b)* England. [4371]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Geoffrey Robinson, dated 20 November 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency's handling of appeals, and the associated question regarding the Agency's caseload.

The latest period for which full-time information is available is financial year 1995/96. The details requested are not available as specified, ie West Midlands and England. The figures set out in the table attached are for the Agency as a whole, and for Dudley Child Support Agency Centre (CSAC), which has responsibility for cases in the West Midlands (and other areas).

Included are the numbers of appeals received and cleared in 1995/96. Clearances are made up of cases withdrawn, cases outside the jurisdiction of the Independent Tribunal Service (ITS), and those submitted to ITS; they also include cases from the previous year which were not cleared until 1995/96. You should note that appeals can be lodged for a number of reasons, and a successful appeal will not always result in a change in the maintenance assessment.

ITS provide information on decisions only on an Agency basis, and it is therefore not possible to give a breakdown of those cases upheld or overturned for Dudley.

With regard to the question on the average delay between successful appeal to the CSA and the correction in the maintenance payments, we do not routinely collect the information in the form requested.

However, we have recently taken a business decision to re-assess cases returned by ITS in a Central Appeals Unit (CAU), rather than in the CSACs, and this has been in operation since September. This ensures closer, central control of the process. A recent sample of cases processed under this arrangement showed that once the decision of the ITS reaches the CAU, it currently takes an average of 14 working days for them to gather relevant information and to carry out a re-assessment. The case is then passed to the relevant CSAC for implementation of the revised assessment.

I hope this is helpful.

	Total for agency 1995–96	*Total for Dudley 1995–96*
Number of appeals received	7,121	1,190
Number of appeals cleared	8,117	1,270
Number of appeals submitted to ITS[1]	6,948	1,075
Number of appeals where CSO's[2] decision upheld	1,236	n/a
Number of appeals where CSO's[2] decision overturned	4,399	n/a
Number of cases taken on by CSA	386,052	63,268

[1] ITS = Independent Tribunal Service.

[2] CSO = Child Support Officer.

n/a = not available.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many cases set out in his answer of 7 November 1995, *Official Report, 435,* are represented by the headings *(a)* resulting from pre-CSA assessment paid direct to parent with care, *(b)* resulting from pre-CSA assessment paid through the agency collection service, *(c)* resulting from CSA assessments paid direct to parent with care and *(d)* resulting from CSA assessments paid through agency collection service for each month in the financial year April 1994 to March 1995. [4778]

Mr. Mitchell: There is no business need to maintain data in this format. The information requested is not available.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many staff are currently employed by the Benefits Agency on a casual basis; [4517]

(2) how many staff were asked to leave the Benefits Agency's employment who had been employed for less than two years in the last year. [4518]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is an operational matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 20 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary questions asking how many staff are currently employed by the Benefits Agency (BA) on a casual basis; and how many staff were asked to leave the BA employment who had been employed for less than two years in the last year.

As at the 31 October 1996 the Benefits Agency employed 4,596 casual staff out of a total staff in post figure of 84,241, this includes part time staff.

The following staff with less than 2 years service have left the Benefits Agency within the last 12 months. Details of the reasons for members of staff leaving is not available.

	Number
Permanent	730
Fixed term appointment	712
Casual	4,809

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Publicity

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total amount currently spent by his Department on advertising and publicity in promoting greater awareness of the availability of benefits; and what proportion of the budget is specifically targeted at *(a)* pensioners and *(b)* eligible pensioners who are not currently claiming the full amount of benefits. [4735]

Mr. Burt: The allocation for the current financial year for publicity and advertising is:

Headquarters: £3,855,000

Benefits agency: £5,009,000

War pensions agency: £20,000

The headquarters allocation is for the promotion of awareness of in–work benefits such as family credit and disability working allowance.

The Benefits Agency figure covers the cost of the BA leaflet programme, posters audio cassettes, etcetera, giving information on all the social security benefits administered by the BA.

The War Pensions Agency looks for opportunities to increase awareness by the free display of its leaflets and posters in places such as doctors' surgeries, war museums, post offices, hospital waiting rooms, etcetera. This targets not only potential new claimants but those who may be eligible to claim increased pension and allowances.

The Department ensures that people are in a position to make informed choices on whether to claim benefit. It provides information which is comprehensive, accurate, accessible and easily understood which enables people to establish their eligibility. The Benefits Agency, for example, makes available all information on the social security benefits it administers through outlets including all BA offices, post offices and intermediaries such as the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and Age Concern. Ultimately, individuals may decide for various reasons not to claim.

It is not possible to identify separately promotional expenditure specifically for pensioners.

Resource Accounting

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress his Department is making with the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting; and in respect of which financial year he expects to publish the first set of resource accounts. [4992]

Mr. Burt: The Department's programme to introduce resource accounting and budgeting is both complex and massive. Its agencies are upgrading some financial systems and developing new ones to account for programme expenditure and income, and their associated administrative costs; the corporate centre is developing a system to consolidate these and the accounting outputs of its other business units with performance output data to produce departmental resource accounts. Steady progress is being sustained and the Department aims to achieve the milestones set out in Cm 2929, commencing with the preparation of internal resource accounts for 1998–99,

publication of resource accounts for 1999–2000 and culminating in the introduction of full resource planning, budgeting and accounting by 2001–02.

Carers

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security to what extent the support given by carers will be counted as a service for which national earnings could be calculated under the Social Security Benefit (Computation of Earnings) Regulations 1996 (SI 1996, No. 2745. [5092]

Mr. Roger Evans: Regulation 4(2) of SI 1996 No. 2745 provides that, where a claimant performs a service for another person and that person makes no payment of earnings or pays less than that paid for a comparable employment in the area, the adjudicating authority shall treat the claimant as possessing such earnings as is reasonable for that employment. However, the claimant will not be treated as possessing earnings where the other person's means are insufficient for him to pay or to pay more for the service, or if the claimant is engaged by a charitable or voluntary organisation or is a volunteer, if the adjudicating authority is satisfied in any of those cases that it is reasonable for him to provide his services free of charge.

Benefit Regulations

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidance he intends to give his Department's offices in respect of the calculation of a work cycle under the Social Security Benefit (Computation of Earnings) Regulations 1996 (SI 1996, No. 2745). [5093]

Mr. Roger Evans: Guidance on the calculation of a work cycle under the regulations will be included in the information on the new rules being issued currently by the Benefits Agency to its offices. In addition, the chief adjudication officer will be issuing guidance to adjudication officers about the changes. This will also include guidance on the calculation of a work cycle.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received regarding the Social Security (Computation of Earnings) Regulations 1996 and Social Security (Invalid Care Allowance) Amendment Regulations 1996 (SI 1996, No. 2744). [5094]

Mr. Evans: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has received one representation. The chairman of the Social Security Advisory Committee wrote following the committee's meeting in October at which it was decided that the regulations could be made without a formal reference to the committee.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what provisions he has made to help claimants who will lose their entitlement under the new rules of the Social Security Benefit (Computation of Earnings) Regulations 1996 (SI 1996, No. 2745). [5099]

Mr. Evans: The regulations do not include transitional protection measures for claimants who will lose their entitlement under the new rules.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many invalid allowance claimants currently have allowable travel costs; [5095]

(2) how many current recipients of invalid care allowance will be affected by the changes in the Social Security Benefit (Computation of Earnings) Regulations 1996 (SI 1996, No. 2745) that costs of union and professional association membership will no longer by disregarded; [5096]

(3) how many current recipients of invalid care allowance presently have substitute care costs disregarded; and what is the total annual cost of this care. [5097]

Mr. Burt: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people will be affected by the loss of entitlement to invalid care allowance in the first weeks of claim as a result of the Social Security Benefit (Computation of Earnings) Regulations 1996 (SI 1996, No. 2745). [5098]

Mr. Burt: There are insufficient data on which to base reliable estimates. However, we anticipate that the number affected in this way will be small.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many invalid care allowance claimants there are and what assessment he has made of the effect of the introduction of the Social Security (Invalid Care Allowance) Amendment Regulations 1996 (SI 1996, No. 2744) and Social Security Benefit (Computation of Earnings) Regulations 1996 on this figure. [5100]

Mr. Roger Evans: As at 18 November there were approximately 350,000 recipients of invalid care allowance. There are insufficient data on which to base reliable estimates of the effect of the introduction of the regulations. However, we anticipate that the numbers affected by the regulations referred to will be small.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he has taken to ascertain how many people will benefit from the Social Security (Invalid Care Allowance) Amendment Regulations 1996 (SI 1996, No. 2744) and Social Security Benefit (Computation of Earnings) Regulations 1996 (SI 1996, No. 2745); how many people will no longer be able to claim; and if he will make a statement. [5101]

Mr. Evans: Data are not available to estimate accurately how many people will gain or lose from the introduction of the regulations and the costs of obtaining such information would be disproportionate. No one will be prevented from claiming as a result of the regulations.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the costs of implementing the Social Security (Invalid Care Allowance) Amendment Regulations 1996 (SI 1996, No. 2744) and Social Security Benefit (Computation of Earnings) Regulations 1996 (SI 1996, No. 2745); and what net savings he estimates will accrue from the introduction of these measures. [5102]

Mr. Evans: The cost of implementing the regulations is expected to be negligible. There are insufficient data on which to base reliable revenue estimates. However, we expect the revenue effects to be broadly cost neutral.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many current recipients of invalid care allowance have earnings; and what are the average earnings of current recipients of invalid care allowance before deductions and disregarded payment. [5103]

Mr. Burt: As at 18 November 1996, some 26,500 invalid care allowance recipients had earnings. Information about average amounts of earnings is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Appeal Tribunals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of appellants who did not attend social security appeal tribunal hearings gave advance notice that they would not be present in the last available year. [5151]

Mr. Roger Evans: This information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 14 November, *Official Report*, column *328*, when the Council on Tribunals was assured that his Department would make appellants aware of the consequences of not opting for an oral hearing; and if that communication was included in the correspondence with the Council on Tribunals placed in the Library. [5259]

Mr. Evans: Discussions with the Council on Tribunals are conducted on a confidential basis. However, in the case of the letter sent to the council formally consulting on the regulations, their reply, and a further letter from the Department, have been placed in the Library to assist understanding of the purpose and effect of these regulations.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answers of 4 November, *Official Report*, column *386*, and of 14 November, *Official Report*, column *328*, for what reasons the appeal form approved on 27 September was not available to appellants on 21 October when the Social Security (Adjudication) and Child Support Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1996 came into force; when he was informed that it would not be available on that date; and for what reason a copy of it was not placed in the Library on 4 November in response to the request by the hon. Member for Newport, West. [5265]

Mr. Evans: The printing and production of the revised leaflet was more difficult than normal, and did take longer, because of the physical structure of the leaflet and fold-out form. Arrangements were in place for the continued use of the existing form until the new version could be distributed and appellants would not be disadvantaged during the changeover period. As I said in my letter of 14 November to members of the Sixth Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation, a copy of which has been placed in the Library I regret that the answer at column *386* of 4 November was incorrect. On that day, the form placed in the Library was the April 1996 version. The revised version was not available from the printers until late on 18 November and has been placed in the Library. During the course of the debate in the Sixth Standing Committee, I became aware that the correct form was not available and the incorrect form had been placed in the Library.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) pursuant to his answer of 14 November, *Official Report*, column *328*, what proportion of the total number of tribunal chairmen and members the 100 copies of the Green Paper and summary sent to the independent tribunal service represented; [5257]

(2) if he will extend the closing date for responses to the consultation paper "Improving decision making and appeals in Social Security", so that all chairmen and members of tribunals can be invited to respond. [5258]

Mr. Evans: There are some 6,000 chairmen and members within the independent tribunal service. The ITS is an independent body and distribution of the consultation paper "Improving decision making and appeals in Social Security" within the service is a matter for the president. At the president's request, copies of the consultation paper were sent direct to all regional and full-time chairmen. Additional copies were also sent to the president at his request. The consultation period ran from 23 July to 18 October and the Government have no plans to extend the closing date for comments. Responses were received both from the president—reflecting replies he had received from tribunal members—and, separately, from a number of chairmen and members. Independent analysis of the responses is now under way.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchcliffe) of 13 November, *Official Report*, columns *270–71*, by whom the responses to the consultation paper "Improving decision making and appeals in Social Security" are being independently analysed. [5256]

Mr. Evans: The independent analysis of the responses to the consultation document "Improving decision making and appeals in Social Security" is being undertaken by Dr. Roy Sainsbury of the social policy research unit at York university.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has received from the independent tribunal service regarding the arrangements for tribunal members to receive the documents relating to appeals in advance of the hearing where an oral hearing is not requested. [5260]

Mr. Evans: This is a matter for the president of the independent tribunal service whom I understand has written to the hon. Member to explain the arrangements he has put in place.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will have collated the information on the effect of the Social Security (Adjudication) and Child Support Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1996 on the number of appeals to each type of tribunal affected by them and the numbers of oral hearings resulting from those appeals. [5266]

Mr. Evans: An evaluation of the impact of the changes will be carried out over the first year of operation. However, we expect to have some interim results after about six months.

Telephones

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what percentage of social security claimants do not have a telephone in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* north Wales. [5263]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The available information is in the table.

	In receipt of benefits	*Not in receipt of benefits*	*All individuals*
Number of benefit units with no telephone (millions)			
Great Britain	2.2	0.5	2.7
Wales	0.2	0.0	0.2
Percentages			
Great Britain	11 per cent.	5 per cent.	9 per cent.
Wales	15 per cent.	6 per cent.	12 per cent.

Source:
Information for Great Britain and Wales is available from the family resources survey; the sample size is insufficient to provide figures for north Wales.

Notes:
1. Numbers rounded to nearest hundred thousand.
2. Estimates are subject to sampling error.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 14 November, *Official Report*, column *329*, for what reasons the temporary nature of asylum seekers' immigration status is relevant to the rate of income support payable to them; and what would be the cost of making them entitled to the full rate of income support. [5264]

Mr. Roger Evans: Asylum seekers are not entitled to income support under the normal rules, but those who claim asylum when they first arrive in the United Kingdom may claim income support under the urgent cases rules. Payments under these rules continue until the Home Office decide on the asylum application. If the asylum seeker is successful and granted refugee status benefit can be paid at the same rate as is paid to United Kingdom nationals. The Government believe that it is right to make a distinction between those whose status is settled and whose right to stay in the United Kingdom is established and those where it is not yet clear that the asylum claim is well founded. Only 4 per cent. of asylum applications are successful.

The cost of making asylum seekers entitled to the full rate of income support and jobseeker's allowance would be approximately £10 million a year.

Industrial Injuries

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has received the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council's report on asbestos-related diseases; and what is his response. [5828]

Sir Jim Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his response to the recommendations in the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council's report on chronic bronchitis and emphysema. [5829]

Mr. Lilley: We have considered very carefully the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council's report on the qualifying conditions for the award of disablement benefit for chronic bronchitis and emphysema, Cm 3240, and will implement the extension they have recommended in full. This will make it easier for coal miners who are disabled by these diseases to qualify for benefit, and simpler to administer the scheme.

We have also received and considered very carefully the report of the council's review of asbestos-related diseases, which is being laid before Parliament and published today, Cm 3467. The council recommends a number of welcome improvements to the rules for those suffering from these diseases. These will help claimants and their advisers to identify more easily whether they might qualify. In particular, they aim to get benefit to mesothelioma sufferers more quickly. We will also implement these recommendations in full.

I am grateful to the council for the expert and detailed scrutiny it has given to these important issues, and for the practical way in which its recommended improvements are presented. Taken together, around 8,000 industrially disabled people are expected to gain from these changes.

I will be consulting the council on draft regulations to give effect to all these changes. The regulations will be laid to come into force from April 1997. We expect that a large number of people who have previously failed to qualify for benefit will wish to claim again from this date under the changed criteria. Considerable preparation is required to ensure their cases are speedily and effectively considered, without disrupting the Benefits Agency's service to its other customers. Details of the new arrangements will be well publicised before implementation.

DEFENCE

Resource Accounting

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress his Department is making with the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting; and in respect of which financial year he expects to publish the first set of resource accounts. [4985]

Mr. Soames: In keeping with the time scales set out in Cm 2929, my Department has launched Project Capital to integrate commercial-style accounting, output costing and management planning into a single financial regime.

In May of this year an accounting systems integration contract was awarded, following competition, to develop and build a core solution to meet all primary accounting, financial and planning requirements of MOD organisations; to implement new systems throughout the Department; and to provide new skills training to finance and planning staff.

The accounting systems integrator has completed a series of surveys to plan the roll-out of new systems. Early design work and setting detailed accounting policies are

being conducted in parallel, and studies into information technology infrastructure and procedures for stock valuation are under way. Work on the registration and valuation of fixed assets, supported by commercial valuers, is proceeding.

Some 800 staff have so far attended awareness training courses and the in-house facility for training candidates for the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants qualification has been expanded substantially.

The first year for which resource accounts are expected to be published and laid before Parliament is 1999–2000.

Gulf War

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on leakage from containers of pesticide during the Gulf war; [5187]

(2) what level of protective clothing was issued to staff applying insecticides in the Gulf war; and in what languages written instructions relating to pesticides appeared. [5188]

Mr. Soames: These are matters that form part of the comprehensive investigation into the use of organophoshate pesticides during the Gulf war which I announced last month, *Official Report* 15 October, columns *678*. I will report further when this work is complete.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research has been undertaken by his Department into the dangers of pesticides to veterans in the Gulf war. [5261]

Mr. Soames: No formal research has been undertaken by my Department into the possible effects of exposure to pesticides on the health of Gulf war veterans. We have, however, urgently examined the medical records of those who have attended the Gulf veterans' medical assessment programme and are inviting those who display certain symptoms to return for further assessment. We shall shortly announce details of the further research we will be commissioning into the health problems of Gulf war veterans.

Defence Estate

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will present an annual report to Parliament on the environmental status of the Defence estate in the United Kingdom and overseas territories. [5071]

Mr. Soames: The annual statement on the defence estimates includes within the section on the management of defence a report on the defence estate and environmental issues.

Air Traffic Control

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the decision was taken by his Department to transfer air traffic control responsibilities from West Drayton to Swanwick. [5105]

Mr. Soames: The decision to move the military en route task from West Drayton to Swanwick to continue the integrated nature of en route air traffic control services was taken in 1991. When it became apparent that extra space would be available at Swanwick, the option of also moving the military area air navigation task to Swanwick was explored and a decision in principle was taken in October 1994. This decision was, and remains, subject to final confirmation of the costs.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the capacity of the West Drayton air traffic control centre to deal with increased military air traffic. [5107]

Mr. Soames: Based on the current prediction that military air traffic movements will remain broadly constant, the facilities currently available at West Drayton would be capable of supporting military area air navigation services without significant equipment replacement up to 2005.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contingency plans he has made, in the event of his Department deciding not to relocate the air traffic control system from West Drayton to Swanwick. [5109]

Mr. Soames: My Department continues to support the proposals to transfer both the military en route and the military area air navigation task from West Drayton to Swanwick. Were this to be judged impracticable or uneconomic, other options would be considered, but at this stage we remain optimistic that the proposals can be enacted.

RAF Scampton and RAF Swindeby

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his proposals for *(a)* RAF Scampton and *(b)* RAF Swinderby. [5138]

Mr. Soames: Subject to the agreement of a planning brief for RAF Scampton, it is our intention to dispose of the site, although the married quarters are to be retained. RAF Swinderby has already been sold.

Armed Forces Pensions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many former members of the armed forces have pensions which are frozen until they reach the age of 55 years. [5184]

Mr. Soames: As at 31 March 1996, there were 84,486 former members of the armed forces in receipt of an early retirement service pension, which does not attract annual pension increases until age 55.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will delay the tabling of statutory instruments under section 2 of the Armed Forces Act 1996 for further consultation with interested parties and provide a six-month period for such consultation. [5332]

Mr. Soames: No. The statutory instruments to be tabled under section 2 of the Armed Forces Act 1996 provide for military local service engagements and thus allow the formation of the Military Provost Guard Service. This has been the subject of full consultation with interested parties.

Ex-military Bases (Accommodation)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on consulting local authorities in areas where ex-military bases have been closed, and the former service housing is to be sold to seek to ensure that jobs, education facilities and health services will exist for people who will move into such accommodation; and if he will make a statement. [5394]

Mr. Soames: Where a site has been declared surplus to Defence requirements, it is the policy of my Department to work closely with the local authorities concerned, normally through the local plan process or by the production of a development brief. Matters such as jobs, schools and health services are for the local authority, but are considered as part of the local plan process and, if appropriate, as part of a development brief. In some cases, service families who previously occupied accommodation associated with a site will have made use of the local facilities, such as schools.

RAF Finningley

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his proposals for the future of RAF Finningley; and what is the proposed timetable for carrying out these plans. [4560]

Mr. Soames: RAF Finningley is to be sold. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has agreed to a request from the Home Secretary to use part of the site as a prison, and this has resulted in a slight delay to the original timetable. The expressions of interest campaign has, however, been completed, and my Department will shortly be inviting shortlisted candidates to submit formal bids. We hope to be in a position to commence negotiations with a preferred bidder in early 1997.

Beef

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to ensure that the beef served to members of the armed forces in each defence establishment and station is from the United Kingdom. [5011]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The procurement of food for the armed forces is contracted to the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes. My Department does not specify the source of origin from which NAAFI should obtain beef—or any other meat—but expects it to seek the best market price for the product. Based on current volumes and prevailing prices, a switch to British beef would cost an additional £1 million per financial year.

Military Assistance (Rwanda and Zaire)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the military assistance given by the UK to Rwanda and Zaire between 1 January 1991 and 31 December 1995; and what was the cost of such assistance. [5148]

Mr. Soames: No military assistance was provided to Zaire or Rwanda in that period. A member of the Royal Army Medical Corps has, however, provided assistance in 1995 to the independent international commission of inquiry set up at the request of the Government of Rwanda to investigate events surrounding deaths of an unknown number of persons at the Kibeho refugee camp.

Troops in Bosnia (Telephone Calls)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many free telephone calls per week are allowed for British troops serving in Bosnia; when the number of free calls was last altered; what form the alteration took; and if he will make a statement. [5406]

Mr. Soames: Most troops serving in Bosnia are not entitled to make free private telephone calls, but have access to payphones to make telephone calls home. A welfare telephone allowance—WTA—currently £22 per month, is paid to troops as a contribution towards the cost of these calls. There is no restriction on the number or duration of calls made.

The very small number of troops who do not have access to welfare payphones may use the military communications system for a free weekly call home. These personnel do not receive the WTA.

This system has been in place since troops were deployed to Bosnia in December 1995 as part of IFOR.

Low Flying

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made towards implementing the planned reduction in low flying in the borders tactical training area; when the full reduction will be achieved; what plans there are for monitoring the progress of the reduction in volume; and if he will make a statement. [5370]

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence announced on 6 August that operational low flying will be distributed between the three tactical training areas in proportion to their areas when averaged over a year. Action to achieve this aim was set in hand immediately, and the redistribution will be achieved by the end of July 1997. Thereafter, activity will be monitored by calendar year.

Army Recruitment

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the current year's recruitment targets for each Army regiment. [4423]

Mr. Soames: Pursuant to my answer of 15 November, *Official Report*, columns *375–76*, I regret that, due to a typographical error, the figures for recruiting targets for officers and soldiers of the AAC and RAChD were wrongly given. These should have read 24 officers and 160 soldiers in the AAC and 10 officers and 0 soldiers in the RAChD respectively. There are no apprentice targets for these arms. The full table is as follows:

Arm/Service	*Officers*	*Soldiers*	*Apprentices*
H Cav/RAC	69	800	—
RA	88	1,400	—
RE	62	960	234
R Signals	49	1,040	200
Infantry	234	—	—
Household Division	—	800	—
Scottish Division	—	800	—

Arm/Service	Officers	Soldiers	Apprentices
Queen's Division	—	800	—
King's Division	—	800	—
Prince of Wales Division	—	1,020	—
Light Division	—	580	—
Royal Irish (GS)	—	140	—
Parachute Regiment	—	460	—
AAC	24	160	—
RAChD	10	0	—
RLC	82	2,400	186
RAMC	54	200	—
REME	36	640	450
AGC	53	760	—
RAVC	2	32	—
SASC	[1]0	0	—
RADC	10	40	—
INT CORPS	9	100	—
APTC	[1]0	0	—
QARANC	20	120	—
CA Mus	[1]0	120	—
Total	802	14,172	1,070

Combined total=15,242

[1] Officer entry only through late entry commission and SNCOs/WOs transferred from other arms and services.

HEALTH

Edgware General Hospital

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current cost of the coronary care unit at Edgware general hospital; and what is the estimated cost of the coronary care unit at Northwick Park hospital. [3907]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not available centrally.

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what medical conditions the elderly will be occupying immediate needs beds at Edgware general hospital following the transition from an accident and emergency to a casualty department; [4679]

(2) how many immediate needs beds will be maintained at Edgware general hospital in connection with the revised casualty unit. [4681]

Mr. Malone: Following its decision on 25 September, Barnet health authority is currently developing proposals for immediate needs beds in discussion with the North Thames regional office of the National Health Service Executive.

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many coronary care cases have been dealt with by Edgware general hospital in each month. [4683]

Mr. Malone: Information of the type requested is not available centrally.

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has in respect of the redundant medical equipment at Edgware general hospital when existing services are transferred to Barnet, Northwick Park or the Royal Free hospitals; and what is the value of this equipment. [4684]

Mr. Malone: This is a matter for the Wellhouse NHS trust. My hon. Friend may wish to write to the chairman, Mr. David Phillips, to request this information.

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to be in a position to sign contracts with the doctors associated with the new casualty department at Edgware general hospital; and how many contracts will be signed. [4687]

Mr. Malone: Following its decision on 25 September, Barnet Health authority is currently developing proposals for the casualty service at Edgware.

Hospital Admissions (Barnet)

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital admissions in the last 12 months there were in the borough of Barnet; and of these, how many were *(a)* minor and *(b)* acute. [4678]

Mr. Horam: The information collected centrally is on a national health service trust basis. Figures for the two trusts for Barnet health authority for 1995–96, the latest year for which data are available, are shown in the following table:

Number of inpatient and day case admissions in Wellhouse NHS trust and Barnet Healthcare NHS trust, 1995–96

Trust		In-patients	Day cases
Wellhouse trusts	Total activity of	37,617	11,563
	which acute	24,736	11,558
Barnet Healthcare	Total activity of	3,267	0
	which acute	552	0

Source:

Department of Health KP72 returns. Admissions are recorded by speciality types, i.e. acute specialties, maternity, geriatric, mental illness and learning disabilities.

Minor Accident Treatment

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the difference between his Department's and local health authorities' definition of a minor accident treatment service unit. [4682.]

Mr. Horam: There is no national definition. It is for health authorities to plan what services are needed for the treatment of people suffering minor injuries.

National Demonstrator Site

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his correspondence with the hon. Member for Hendon, North, what is his Department's definition of a national demonstrator site. [4680]

Mr. Horam: There is no standard definition for a national demonstrator site.

Acute Care

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how *(a)* his Department and *(b)* Barnet health authority define emergency in the context of acute needs provision. [4685]

Mr. Horam: Clinical practice varies throughout the national health service. Different health authorities and hospitals use the term "emergency" in different ways.

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what differences there are between his Department's and local health authorities' definitions of acute beds and immediate needs bends. [4686]

Mr. Horam: The definition of acute beds for central data collection purposes includes beds in children's and adult general wards, excluding geriatric wards; beds for the younger physically disabled; neonatal cots that are not in maternity wards; and beds in wards for terminally ill/palliative care patients. Central data on immediate needs beds is not collected. The information in central returns provides a useful guide to bed availability; it does not reflect precise clinical practice.

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 4 November, *Official Report*, column *402*, what is Barnet health authority's definition of acute care. [4688]

Mr. Horam: This is a matter for Barnet health authority.

Dentists, Sunderland

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the ratio of *(a)* general dental practitioners and *(b)* community dental practitioners to children aged (i) under four years, (ii) four to 10 years and (iii) 11 to 19 years in the Sunderland health authority area. [4419]

Mr. Malone: The information is contained in the table:

General dental service and community dental service: number of children in the population per general dental practitioner[1 2 3] and community dental[4] practitioners in Sunderland health authority

Age group	*Number of children per general dental practitioners[1 2 3] at 30 June 1996*	*Number of children per community dental practitioners[4] (whole time equivalents) at 30 September 1995*
Under 4	172	2,564
Age 4–10	327	4,883
Age 11–19	392	5,853

[1] The number of dentists (principals) on the health authority list and their assistants and vocational trainees. Sunderland health authority does not employ any salaried dentists.
[2] Some dentists have a contract with more than one health authority. All dentists practising in Sunderland are included.
[3] Excludes hospital dentists.
[4] Figures for community dentists are whole time equivalents and represents the number of staff allocated by: Sunderland Health Commission, Priority Healthcare Wearside NHS trust and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust.
The population figures are at 30 June 1995. Patients are not restricted to receiving dental treatment in the health authority in which they live.

Long-term Care

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the number of persons currently in local authority-run residential care homes, *(b)* the average cost per person per week of residential care in local authority homes and *(c)* the average cost per person per week of residential care in independent sector homes for each local authority social services department in England. [4280]

Mr. Burns: Information on numbers of residents in local authority run staffed residential care homes at 31 March 1995 can be found in "Residential Accommodation: Detailed statistics on residential care homes and local authority supported residents England 1995", copies of which are available in the Library. It is planned to publish figures for 31 March 1996 in the week commencing 25 November. The latest information on the weekly costs of residential care in local authority and independent staffed homes for older people, for 1994–95, can be found in Table U1 of "Key Indicators of local authority social services 1996"; copies of which are also available in the Library.

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to consult *(a)* user groups and *(b)* voluntary organisations in respect of proposed legislation on long-term care. [5146]

Mr. Burns: Draft legislation to establish a partnership scheme will be issued for consultation in the new year. In the meantime officials are consulting informally with major client group interests as well as the insurance industry and local authority representatives.

Antibiotic-resistant Infections

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals have reported outbreaks of methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus in *(a)* the Yorkshire region and *(b)* the United Kingdom in the last six months. [4786]

Mr. Horam: The Public Health Laboratory Service maintains aggregate data on methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus as part of its national surveillance of communicable disease and infection, compiled from requests submitted by hospitals for the typing of isolates. In the six months, up to and including October 1996, 185 hospitals in England and Wales were identified as having an incident in which MRSA was implicated; 11 of these hospitals were in the old Yorkshire regional health authority. These figures represent the number of patients affected by MRSA not the number infected—about 80 per cent. of people who acquire MRSA carry it harmlessly and do not suffer infection. An incident is three or more patients with the same strain in a month from the same hospital.

Questions relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Treatment Statistics (Sheffield)

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many (a) in–patients and (b) out–patients have been treated in Sheffield in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [4898]

Mr. Horam: The number of finished consultant episodes and out–patient attendances for the last three years for each hospital and community unit in Sheffield is given in the tables:

Finished Consultant Episodes
Ordinary admissions and day cases (including well babies)

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Central Sheffield university hospitals	67,907	68,713	71,232
Charles Clifford dental hospital	2,106	1,629	—
Northern general hospital	56,026	58,314	61,126
Sheffield children's hospital	12,488	13,245	12,804
Sheffield community health	—	3,897	4,649
Sheffield community services unit	291	—	—
Sheffield mental health unit	2,753	—	—
Weston Park hospital	7,070	8,286	9,700
Total	148,641	154,084	159,511

Out-patient attendances

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Central Sheffield university hospitals	277,316	295,309	395,856
Charles Clifford dental hospital	59,598	62,,492	—
Northern general hospital	162,042	165,811	173,480
Sheffield children's hospital	51,120	59,756	58,450
Sheffield community health	—	11,975	18,718
Sheffield community services unit	0	—	—
Sheffield mental health unit	12,824	—	—
Weston Park hospital	41,512	37,410	32,108
Total	604,412	632,753	678,610

[1] Figures are provided for the trusts and directly managed units as existed each year. Charles Clifford Dental Hospital merged with Central Sheffield University Hospital NHS trust in 1995–96. Sheffield community services unit and Sheffield mental health unit merged in 1994–95 to form Sheffield Community Health NHS trust.
[2] Figures are collected on a provider basis and do not represent finished consultant episodes and outpatient attendances for Sheffield residents.
[3] Further information by specialty for England, regional office areas and trusts is published in "Ordinary and day case admissions for England" and "Outpatients and ward attenders, England", copies of which are available in the Library. The latest information for 1995–96 will be placed in the Library by the end of November.

European Union

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost in the last 12 months of sending Ministers and officials to meetings in Brussels and elsewhere in Europe in connection with his Department's handling of EU business. [4946]

Mr. Malone: The Department does not account separately for running costs expenditure on travel, subsistence and other overseas expenses connected with European Union business.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of his Department's time and resources are spent dealing with administrative and policy matters connected with British membership of the European Union. [4956]

Mr. Malone: This information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mixed-sex Wards (West Yorkshire)

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those hospitals in West Yorkshire which have mixed sex wards. [4788]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact chairmen of the trusts in West Yorkshire for details.

Fluoride

Mr. Donald Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue advice that fluoridated toothpaste and fluoride supplements should not be used in fluoridated areas. [5002]

Mr. Malone: Advice is available in the Dental Practitioners' Formulary, the British National Formulary and information provided by the manufacturers of fluoride supplements, that systemic fluoride supplements should not be taken where water contains more than 0.7mg fluoride per litre. Fluoride toothpaste regarded as a cosmetic falls within the scope of the Cosmetic Product Safety Regulations 1989, as amended. In these pastes the fluoridating compound is restricted to 0.15 per cent. All fluoride toothpastes must be labelled as containing the substance. Copies of the DPF and BNF are available in the Library.

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission studies to determine the current average fluoride content of bone in each age group for *(a)* long-fluoridated and *(b)* unfluoridared areas of Britain. [5001]

Mr. Malone: The Department has no plans to commission such studies.

NHS Network

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS executives are participating in the NHS network. [5185]

Mr. Dorrell: I have no departmental responsibility for the national health service network.

Resource Accounting

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress his Department is making with the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting; and in respect of which financial year he expects to publish the first set of resource accounts. [4981]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health is currently enhancing its accounting system to meet the requirements of resource accounting by 1 April 1997. The Department, in common with others, is preparing to implement resource budgeting in time to form the basis for the 2000 survey. As set out in the White Paper "Better Accounting for the Taxpayer's Money: The Government's Proposals—Resource Accounting and Budgeting in Government," the first published resource accounts for the Department and other departments will be in respect of 1999–2000. Copies of the White Paper, Cm 2929, are available in the Library.

Farmers (Suicide)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to receive the findings of the research commissioned from the Warneford hospital, Oxford, into suicides among farmers; and if he will make a statement. [4909]

Mr. Burns: The Department of Health has commissioned Professor Keith Hawton, University of Oxford, to undertake a study on suicides in high risk

occupational groups, including an investigation of suicides among farmers. The study is in its final stages, and a report is expected in early 1997.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Environmental Auditing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission if he will list the ways in which the National Audit Office has *(a)* demonstrated by example and *(b)* promoted externally, the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing; and if he will make a statement. [4509]

Sir Terence Higgins: The National Audit Office is committed to a policy of concern for environmental issues. Energy management practices in the National Audit Office headquarters building have resulted in better performance than is typical according to the Building Research Establishment's published data for the type of building, and the office is committed to reducing the use of energy in line with Government targets. The National Audit Office uses environmentally preferred products where possible, recycles waste, and works with its suppliers to achieve environmental objectives.

As part of its statutory reporting to Parliament, the National Audit Office has published a number of reports addressing a range of environmental issues, including anti-pollution measures, conservation programmes, and the impact of transport on the environment. A list of 17 such reports over the last five years has been placed in the Library. For example, the report by the Comptroller and Audit General entitled, "Buildings and Environment", published in 1994, examined how the Department of the Environment had set energy conservation requirements through the building regulations, and had promoted energy efficiency measures and awareness of their importance to households, building managers and the construction industry. The National Audit Office is also contributing to development work on Environmental Auditing for the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Live Animal Exports

13. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the adequacy of Council directive 95/29/EEC to safeguard the welfare of live farm animals exported from the United Kingdom. [3732]

Mrs. Browning: The directive provides for the first time a framework within which we can seek to ensure that all member states fulfil their responsibility to enforce agreed Community-wide rules on animal welfare in transit.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the dates during 1995 and 1996 when his officials at Dover have requested advice under the Welfare of Animals During Transport Order 1994 due to their concern that a vessel was about to sail in weather and sea conditions when unnecessary suffering or injury might have been caused to the livestock on board; [5397]

(2) if he will list the dates during 1995–96 on which a notice has been served by his staff under the Welfare of Animals During Transport Order 1994 on ships leaving any United Kingdom port prohibiting them from sailing due to adverse weather and the risk of unnecessary suffering or injury to livestock on board; [5395]

(3) on what dates advice has been given to field staff as cited in his instruction "Advice to Field Staff, Carriage of Livestock in Rough Weather, October 1996"; [5399]

(4) on how many occasions during 1995–96 a written or verbal instruction has been issued that the decision to sail in adverse weather with livestock on board must rest solely with the master of the vessel; [5398]

(5) if he will list the dates during 1995–96 on which a notice has been served by his staff under the Welfare of Animals During Transport Order 1994 during a prospective channel crossing on any vehicle preventing it from boarding a vessel due to rough weather and the risk of unnecessary suffering or injury; [5396]

(6) what advice was given when Ministry inspectors at Dover telephoned the State Veterinary Service livestock transport adviser or the veterinary adviser, animal health and welfare section at Tolworth on 6 November about a prospective sailing by the M.V. Cap Afrique. [5400]

Mrs. Browning: Communication between the Ministry's staff at Dover and headquarters is frequent, and often by telephone and unrecorded. Discussions on the weather have the aim of assisting the staff at Dover to form a view. No notices have been served on ships or vehicles to prevent transport on grounds of rough weather. Guidance to staff on this matter is clearly set out in a document entitled, "Advice to Field Staff, Carriage of Livestock by Sea in Rough Weather". A copy is being placed in the Library of the House.

Feeding Stuffs (Contamination)

14. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the extent of contamination of feeding stuffs; and if he will make a statement. [3733]

Mrs. Browning: Surveillance effort is concentrated on food for direct consumption, supported by periodic analyses of feeding stuffs whether for veterinary or pesticide residues or a range of contaminants controlled by the Feeding Stuffs Regulations 1995.

Cattle Cull

15. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress being made towards the implementation of the selective cull of cattle in accordance with the Florence agreement. [3734]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Government announced on 19 September that they would not proceed for the present with the selective cull of cattle in relation to BSE.

17. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met representatives of the farming unions to discuss the throughput of animals to slaughter under the current cull scheme; and if he will make a statement. [3736]

Mr. Hogg: I meet the National Farmers Union regularly to discuss BSE issues, including the operation of the over-30-months scheme.

Veal Calves

16. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further plans he has to end the transport of live veal calves to the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [3735]

Mrs. Browning: None. However, provisions on directive 95/29 on animal welfare in transit are properly implemented and enforced throughout the Community.

Agricultural Wages Board

18. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the operations of the Agricultural Wages Board; and if he will make a statement. [3737]

Mr. Boswell: After consultation following the last formal review of the operation of the Agricultural Wages Board in 1993, the Government decided broadly to retain the existing arrangements, but these are kept under review.

BSE

20. **Mrs Peacock:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to ensure that the Government's BSE controls are rigorously enforced in the slaughterhouses. [3739]

Mrs. Browning: The Government have made substantial additional resources available to the Meat Hygiene Service, which is responsible for enforcing the specified bovine material controls in slaughterhouses, to enable it to achieve our objective of full compliance with controls on SBM.

The State Veterinary Service also carries out regular unannounced surveillance visits to all plants handling SBM. This surveillance is now showing a consistently high level of compliance in slaughterhouses.

21. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the National Farmers Union on matters relating to BSE in the last month. [3740]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have received a number of representations from the NFU both at meetings and in writing over this period.

European Fishery Rules

22. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much his Department spent on enforcement of European fisheries rules in the last available year. [3741]

Mr. Baldry: In 1995–96 the Ministry spent some £11 million on monitoring and enforcement of the common fisheries policy on land, at sea and by aerial surveillance.

Common Fisheries Policy

23. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had with EC Commissioner Bonino regarding fish quotas for 1997. [3742]

Mr. Baldry: I have not yet had any discussions with Mrs. Bonino regarding fish quotas for 1997.

28. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next expects to meet *(a)* Commissioner Bonino and *(b)* other European Union Ministers to discuss the effectiveness of the common fisheries policy. [3747]

Mr. Baldry: I next expect to meet Mrs. Bonino and other European Union Ministers to discuss the common fisheries policy on 22 November.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions were held on matters relating to the common fisheries policy and proposals for its modification when he last met his colleagues from other member states of the European Union. [3702]

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), on 16 October 1996, *Official Report*, columns *938–40*.

29. **Mr. John Townend:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what European Union support each of the member states of the European Union has received in respect of their fishing industries in each of the last three years. [3748]

Mr. Baldry: Planned EU expenditure under the financial instrument for fisheries guidance for the last three years as indicated in member states' sectoral plans for 1994–99 is set out in the table. Details of amounts actually received are not readily available.

(Mecu)	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Austria	0	0.40	0.40
Belgium	4.14	4.14	4.14
Denmark	23.31	23.31	23.32
Finland	0	4.94	5.33
France	36.84	37.29	37.72
Germany	19.42	24.42	25.42
Greece	21.67	21.67	21.67
Ireland	3.00	6.20	8.00
Italy	61.16	61.16	61.16
Luxembourg	0.21	0.34	0.34
Netherlands	9.14	9.14	9.21
Portugal	25.59	26.81	30.89
Spain	154.13	165.28	175.92
Sweden	0	8.36	8.60
UK	16.18	20.60	25.05

Beef Farmers

24. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and food what support he plans to provide to those beef farmers *(a)* in Staffordshire and *(b)* elsewhere striving to use non-extensive production methods. [3743]

Mr. Boswell: Beef farmers in Staffordshire and elsewhere may claim support under the livestock schemes run by the Ministry provided that they meet the rules of

those schemes, including those relating to stocking density. We have no plans to provide additional support specifically to non-extensive producers.

Farm Incomes

25. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on projected farm incomes in less favoured areas in the United Kingdom in 1997. [3744]

Mr. Boswell: Following the autumn review of the economic prospects of hill and upland farms, the hill livestock compensatory allowance payment levels for 1997 will be announced on 26 November. Tables showing income levels for cattle and sheep farms in the less favoured areas in the United Kingdom will be deposited in the House Library on that date, these will include forecasts for 1996–97.

Sheep Products Ban

26. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he has taken in respect of the German ban on sheep products from Britain. [3745]

Mrs. Browning: Germany has proposed a ban on the use, in feedstuffs or cosmetics, of brain, spinal cord and eyes from sheep and goats over 12 months of age from France or the United Kingdom.

The Commission has put to the Standing Veterinary Committee a proposal for EU-wide controls and this is under discussion. The UK Government support the Commission in pressing for EU-wide measures and we take an active part in discussions with our European partners. Our objective remains to seek an early agreement on a European basis on this issue.

Livestock Industry Support

27. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of his Department's expenditure in 1997 in support of the livestock industry. [3746]

Mrs. Browning: Estimated expenditure, including EU-funded expenditure, in 1997–97 in support of the livestock industry is £2,499 million. Of this £445 million is expected to occur in January–March 1997. An announcement of estimated expenditure in 1997–98 will be made shortly. These figures include expenditure relating to intervention buying, export refunds, private storage aid, premium schemes and BSE measures but not hill livestock compensatory allowances.

Resource Accounting

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress his Department is making with the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting; and in respect of which financial year he expects to publish the first set of resource accounts. [4986]

Mr. Boswell: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be introducing its resource accounting system during 1997–98. The Department, in common with others, is preparing to implement resource budgeting in time to form the basis for the 2000 survey. As set out in Cm 2929, the first published resource accounts for the Department and all other Departments will be in respect of 1999–2000.

Sheep and Goats

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to amend the Sheep and Goats (Records, Identification and Movement) Order 1996 to implement fully the requirement of Council directive 92/102/EC that there must be in force a national system enabling the holding of birth to be identified in respect of sheep and goats being moved within the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [5402]

Mrs. Browning: There are no immediate plans to amend The Sheep and Goats (Records, Identification and Movement) Order 1996, but this will be kept under review.

Quarantine

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer on 5 November, *Official Report*, column *488*, on quarantine regulations, if his review will extend to the provisions for the importation of dogs and cats from other states in the EU; and if he will make a statement. [5403]

Mrs. Browning: The review will extend to the provisions for the importation of pet dogs and cats from other states in the EU.

Veterinary Medicines

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a list of veterinary medicinal products authorised for marketing in the United Kingdom. [5410]

Mrs. Browning: As recommended by the Agriculture Select Committee, officials of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate are preparing a list of veterinary medicinal products authorised in the United Kingdom. It is intended that the list will be published early in 1997.

Suicides

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research has recently been commissioned by his Department into suicides among farmers; if that research has been published; what its principal conclusions are; what response he has made to the findings; and if he will make a statement. [4908]

Mr. Burns: I have been asked to reply.

The Department of Health has commissioned Professor Keith Hawton, University of Oxford, to undertake a study on suicides in high risk occupational groups, including an investigation of suicides among farmers. The study is in its final stages, and a report is expected in early 1997.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 285**

SESSION 1996–97

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

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Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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